Representations of Belonging in Asian Australian Writing

Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Abstract

Australia has a long and ambivalent history with Asia. With an increasing visibility of the social and political presence of 'Asia' in Australia, the growing importance of the Asian region to Australia's economy, and a transnational mobility of people and cultures across the globe, it becomes more relevant than ever to re-examine how a concept of Asian Australian identity and belonging might be understood in contemporary Australia. This thesis pursues this central question through the examination of a selection of recent Australian literary texts by writers of East and Southeast Asian-descent. In particular, the thesis maps shifting representations of Asian-Australian identity in these texts through increasingly expansive spatial categories – from the individual body, to the domestic home, to the ethnic 'ghetto', to the suburb, and finally to the global world – as their protagonists engage with normative ideas of ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality within Australian society. In different ways, the nine literary works considered in this thesis address the process of marking out a space of belonging in a contemporary culture that still places constant pressure on non-Anglo-Australian notions of identity. Ultimately, each of these works rejects any singular or definitive concept of 'Asian' experience or identity in Australia, in favour of a more complex and flexible understanding that identity and belonging are concepts that are always subject to border-crossing. Above all, these works not only challenge conventional understandings of what it means to be 'Asian' in contemporary Australia, but also challenge conventional understandings of what it means to be 'Australian'.

Statement of Authorship

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Wan Nur Madiha binti Ramlan

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Introduction

This thesis examines a number of recent Asian Australian narratives to analyse what they might tell us about contemporary representations of identity in circumstances where the protagonists struggle with the cultural boundaries of Anglo Australian life. In doing so, it will focus on how different culturally determined spatial categories – from the individual body, to the domestic home, to the 'ethnic' enclave, to the urban suburb, and finally to the transnational space – inform concepts of identity and belonging. Through these different spatial categories, Asian Australian writers explore themes of gender, sexuality, migration, social alienation, assimilation, and transnationalism in a world that is in a state of flux, but where 'identity' is still often classified around outward appearances and conventional understandings of social and national belonging. In examining how these texts explore and challenge concepts of identity and belonging, this thesis considers how a selection of contemporary Asian Australian writers represent what it feels like to inhabit different kinds of cultural space and engage with current socio-political realities in Australia.

In October 2012, the Australian Labor Government headed by Julia Gillard released the White Paper on the role Australia can play in the so-called 'Asian Century'. The White Paper outlined a thirteen-year plan for Australia to capitalise on economic growth in the Asian region. The rhetoric used in the White Paper suggests that Australia is embracing its position of being 'in Asia'. Julia Gillard, in her foreword to the document, states:

> In this century, the region in which we live will become home to most of
>
> the world's middle-class … I want our nation to be a winner in the Asian
>
> century by becoming more resilient, and sharing the new opportunities …
>
> It calls on all of us to play our part in becoming a more Asia-literate and
>
> Asia-capable nation. (Gillard iii)

Successive Australian governments have started to recognise important regional and national implications of forging strong relationships with Asian countries and have actively sought to capitalise on this development. This thought is echoed by a number of scholars who are concerned with the relationship between Asia and Australia and the experiences of Asians in Australia. Ien Ang, in her introduction to *Alter/Asians: Asian–Australian Identities in Art, Media and Popular Culture* (2001), stresses that the increasing visibility of Asia and Asians in Australia is a change that is inevitable (Ang xiii). One of the effects of this growing Asian presence is that there is also an increased recognition of the participation among Australians of Asian descent in political, social, and cultural spheres. As Australia is gearing itself towards a future that involves a more active engagement with its Asian neighbours and citizens, the call for Australians to be more literate about Asia is becoming increasingly insistent and necessary. To be more Asia-literate, the White Paper argues, Australians not only need to keep abreast with the changing economic trends in the region, but also to equip themselves with deeper and broader understanding of different Asian cultures and languages. Judging by the the frequent use of the term 'our region' in the White Paper, Australia seems to be actively embracing its proximity to Asia.

Australian attitudes towards Asia, however, have not always been this enthusiastic or celebratory. In fact, the 'tyranny of distance' has been a significant part of how Australia has viewed Asia, where Australia's distance from the rest of Europe and its proximity to Asia have produced a cultural anxiety about the potential threats Asia might pose. This wariness of Asia also often comes in tandem with an orientalist habit of seeing Asia as the Other, creating conflicting views towards the region and its people.

Despite these ambivalent attitudes towards Asia, it is undeniable that the Asian region has played an important role in how Australians have viewed themselves over the years. David Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska capture this relationship between Asia and Australia in their book *Australia's Asia* (2012). They state that:

Strange things happen when Australians look north. Asia seems to take on

exaggerated shapes that lurch between two extremes … Australians have

frequently felt uncertain about what might happen in the shifting region in

the north. … Rising Asia has long been presented as a test for Australians

… Many critics would argue that it is a test the nation has consistently

failed, giving rise to repeated injunctions for Australians to be Asia-literate.

Such calls are often accompanied by a warning that time is running out,

that backward Australia must adapt to an increasingly prosperous and

educated Asia if it is to survive. (1)

Australia's mixed perceptions of Asia do not concern only those living on the 'outside'. Their reach also ripples to those who are living on the 'inside', to the many Australians who associate themselves with an Asian identity. Although Australia currently holds a positive outlook towards its Asian neighbours, Asian history in Australia reveals how different attitudes were in the past. And while the number of Asians in Australia increased because of the different phases of migration after the Second World War, the history of Asians in the country is arguably a very long one. Despite the perception that Australia was a homogenous society and the efforts to maintain its homogeneity by past governments,, 'Asia' has been part of Australia as early as the the mid-nineteenth-century gold diggings, and it is a history that is, therefore, arguably, just as long as the history of Anglo Australians. And, while Asian history in Australia dates back a long way, the relationship between white Australians and Asian Australians has not always been cordial. At times, it was aggressively antagonistic. This antagonism towards Asians in Australia reflects how Australians viewed their Asian neighbours.

Views on Asia have helped shape the ways in which Asian Australians were treated in the past and continue to be perceived today, and this has continued to problematise Asian Australian subjectivity. While Asian Australians have long been marked as the 'Other', their

precarious position of being 'Asian Australian' was made more visible in 1996. On 10 September 1996, in her now infamous maiden speech to members of parliament, Pauline Hanson argued that 'we [Anglo Australians] are in danger of being swamped by Asians' (*Parliamentary Debates* 3862). The controversy generated by Hanson's maiden speech highlighted the need for Asian Australian voices to be heard and recognised. What followed was more active engagement with, recognition of, and an increase in cultural production by Asian Australians. This movement over the past two decades has helped push for a re-evaluation of Asian experiences in the country and has facilitated efforts to examine Asian Australian cultures. Since Asian Australian visibility and engagement have increased since 1996, why is there still a need to actively engage with the concept of 'Asian Australian'? Why are we still discussing this issue?

Nearly twenty years since Hanson's controversial speech and three years since the celebratory rhetoric articulated in the White Paper, we would expect that attitudes towards Asians and Asian Australians would have changed. Yet, politicians such as Clive Palmer and Tasmanian Senator Jacqui Lambie have continued to give life to Hanson's words. Palmer, who is an Independent MP, has criticised the Chinese government and their control of the Australian economy. In her defence of Clive Palmer, Lambie commented, 'If anybody thinks that we should have a national security and defence policy, which ignores the threat of a Chinese Communist invasion — you're delusional and got rocks in your head' (qtd in Crowe, "Jacqui Lambie backs Clive Palmer with Warning of Chinese 'invasion'"). Despite the fact that both Lambie and Palmer's words seemed to be specifically aimed at the Chinese government and the threat of a rising Asian economy, their rhetoric seem to underlie the continued cultural anxiety surrounding Australian perceptions of Asia and Asians through narratives of invasion and conquest. This sense of an impending Chinese 'invasion' echoes Hanson's words nearly two decades previously and longer historical fears of the 'yellow peril'. Despite Australia's increasingly multicultural landscape, Asian Australians are situated within a largely Anglo Australian society that continues to hold such sentiments. This existing

anxiety and antagonism validate the continuing need for a broader and deeper engagement with the Asian region and with the Asian communities in Australia.

In addition to this lingering antagonism, current policies have also struggled to develop a robustly secure relationship between Australia and Asia. Since the introduction of the White Paper on Australia in the 'Asian Century', there has been a change of government and the enthusiasm for promoting 'Asian literacy' at home has waned. In addition to the lack of interest in understanding Asia better, Australian economic policies also demonstrate a lack of sensitivity towards the country's Asian neighbours. In the OzAsia 2013 panel, 'The Role of Asian Australians in the Debate about Australia's Place in the Asian Century', Ien Ang, Jacqueline Lo, and Jen Tsen Kwok advised that Asian countries do not like to be perceived as Australia's 'cash cow', an approach which is becoming increasingly evident. This change can be felt acutely within the rhetoric of government headed by former Prime Minister Tony Abbott's and the Liberal Party. The Abbott Government's Asian attitudes have been subdued, while some ill-informed political, economic, and social manoeuvres have also tested relationships in the region. Current Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's attitudes towards Asia, however, seem to be more optimistic than Abbott's. Turnbull had noted in his Lowy Lecture, which he delivered on 23 March 2016, that while China's economy is slowing down, South Asian and Southeast Asian nations are just at the beginning of economic prosperity and will offer new opportunities for Australians (*Lowyinstitute.com*). The changes in this political climate, however, have resulted in a growing awareness of the current nature of Asian Australian politics. Thus, it is now even more pertinent to examine the diverse experiences of Australians of Asian heritage, and to comprehend fully the various narratives of belonging that exist within national, international, and increasingly transnational contexts. Although there has long been active scholarly research on Asia and Australia's relationship to it, 'Asia' and 'Australia' have historically been approached as two separate entities. It should be noted, however, Australia relationships with Asia has not always been an exclusively Anglo (white) experience. Instead, scholars such as Regina Ganter in *Mixed*

Relations: Asian-Aboriginal Contact in North Australia (2006) Peta Stephenson in *The Outsiders Within: Telling Australia's Indigenous-Asian Story* (2007) share the overlooked history of the interrelationship between Indigenous Australians, Asians, and white Australia. Understanding the relationship between Indigenous Australians and Asian Australians is important as it exposes their long and complex history and "how in the white imagination they could be twinned with Asians as representing the undesirable 'other'" (Stephenson 5).The study of this relationship helps create a space for people to explore what it means to be an 'Other' in the Australian imagination.

As an academic field, Asian Australian Studies is a relatively small area of research. Nonetheless, it has steadily gained momentum to become a prominent area of examination over the past fifteen years, and is now gaining more recognition. This recognition is not limited to activity within academic circles, but is increasingly visible in the general mass media and in other forms of cultural production. Moreover, the rise of interest in multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism has destabilised traditional social and cultural expectations in the writing of contemporary Asian Australian writers, adding to the visibility of Asian Australian literature, and drawing attention to the existence of a multicultural nation and its limits.

Asian Australian literature is one of a number of Asian Anglo literary 'canons' of so-called 'minor literatures' that can be found around the world. Many of these national bodies of literature share common themes, such as experiences of migration, questions of belonging, displacement, assimilation and crises of identity. These shared ideas beg the question of what makes the Asian Australian canon different from other groups of Asian Anglo writing, such as Asian American or Asian British literature. In order to clarify the distinctiveness of Asian Australian literature, it is important first to examine the character of other Asian Anglo canons as part of this discussion, particularly Asian American writing (which is arguably the biggest and most influential of the Asian Anglo canons), and Asian Canadian literature.

In contrast to Asian Australian writing, the canon in the United States is considered to be a more mature body of literary and scholarly work. The maturity that the Asian American canon has attained is partly attributed to its longer history. 1974 was a pivotal year for Asian American writing, with the publication of *Asian American Heritage: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry*. This text is hailed as the first anthology that features a collection of Asian writing. In the same year, the Combined Asian Resource Project (CARP) produced and published *Aiiieeeeee! Anthology of Asian-American Writers*. This anthology strove to recover and collect nearly forgotten writing from Pan-Asian writers in the fifty years before its publication. The objective set by CARP of trying to recover more than fifty years of writing gives us a glimpse of how far back Asian American writing goes. Today, Asian American literature is generally popular and it is also commercially successful. But what are the forces that helped motivate the growth of Asian American literature? This explosion of development in Asian American literature was partially driven by the American civil rights movement in the 1960s, when Asian American activists focused on literary production (Cheung 1). The movement that called for the end of racial segregation of African Americans also helped raise awareness among members of different Asian American communities about their social–cultural position in the United States. Through the years, Asian American literature kept on growing, and in 1991, there was a surge of new writing and publications from Asian American writers, with Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong calling it a sort of *annus mirabilis* for Asian American writing (Wong 3). It helped promote a pan-ethnic Asian American movement.

With its proximity to the United States, we might wonder if Asian Canadian literature might also share the same development as Asian American literature. Asian Canadian writing, especially by those of East Asian heritage, has gained notable attention from the publishing industry and Canadian universities (Beauregard 53), yet it is still relatively small compared to its Asian American counterpart. Despite this, Asian Canadian writing has grown in the past few decades and has produced a number of recognisable writers. Joy Kogawa, who first

published in the 1980s, and Sky Lee are two of a number of notable Asian Canadian authors today. Terry Watada explains that:

> in 1969, there was no such thing as Asian Canadian writing, at least not as a genre. In fact, there was no such thing as an Asian Canadian. Japanese Canadians were the Japanese; Chinese Canadians were the Chinese. The generic term was 'Oriental'. (Watada 80)

Similarly, Roy Miki in his paper 'Asiancy: Making Space for Asian Canadian Writing', argues that the study of literature written by Canadians of Asian heritage, now known as 'Asian Canadian', is a relatively new development. While literary work by Asian Canadian writers and anthologies was already being published as early as the 1970s, it took two decades for Asian Canadian writing to become recognised as a literary tradition and accorded the same recognition in academic study (Goellnicht 1).

Tseen-Ling Khoo's work, *Banana Bending: Asian–Australian and Asian–Canadian Literatures* (2003), is a study of both national traditions. The title 'Banana Bending', Khoo comments, 'is a playful reference to the physical site from which I write as well as reformation of an epithet that, in the main, functions as disapproval or dismissal' (Khoo 1). In her book, Khoo examines new approaches to reading the styles and different perspectives of multiculturalism in Australia and Canada, which she notes are 'relatively similar' in nature (Khoo 2). One of the reasons for this similarity lies in the fact that Australia modelled its multicultural agenda on Canada's policy. Khoo adds that that both the Australian and Canadian models have encountered similar criticism of trying to perpetuate notions of liberal racism.

The progress of Asian Australian literature followed a somewhat different trajectory to that in North America. When the literature of Asian Americans was beginning to receive exposure and recognition, Australia was still struggling with several issues, the key one being the issue of migration. The White Australia Policy, which was passed in 1901, worked to limit

the migration of non-Europeans, particularly Asians, into Australia. While this policy continued well into the twentieth century, it ceased in the 1960s andand was officially abolished in 1973 by the Whitlam Government. Still, despite the change in official policy and the renewed effort to engage with Asia, negative perceptions and anxieties towards Asia and Asian Australians remain.

This knowledge is partly spoken through the growing number of literary texts produced by Australians of Asian descent or otherwise identified as Asian Australian. Even with the long historical presence of Australians of Asian descent in the country, the emergence of an Asian Australian literary canon is relatively recent. Although Mena Abdullah published her short story 'The Time of the Peacock' in 1965, it was not until the 1980s that literary texts in the English language written by Australians of Asian descent emerged and moved into the spotlight. This development is often attributed to the publication of Brian Castro's first novel, *Birds of Passage*, in 1983. Although Mena Abdullah's and Brian Castro's works were two of the first Asian Australian writings to gain recognition, it was only during the 1990s that Asian Australian literary studies became a recognised field. However, in her article 'You Are What You Read: Asian Australian Fiction in the Asian Century' (2013), Alison Broinowski explains that this trend is changing. She notes that there is now a plateau or even a steady decrease in the publications of Asian Australian literary texts. Broinowski poses a series of questions for us to consider in the hope of understanding why this new trend has emerged. Some of her questions include whether interest in the Middle East has displaced interest in Asia and whether 'Asia has become "normal" for Australian readers' and therefore no longer seems to require its own 'category' (Broinowski 45).

Asian Australian Writing in Anthologies

Another approach that we can take to track the development of Asian Australian writing is through the ways in which it has been anthologised as part of 'Australian literature'. Major anthologies focused on national literatures can measure a perception of texts that are

regarded as important and merit the need for conservation. Anthologies are therefore a genre in which a literary canon emerges and can be examined. At the same time, they expose the mechanics of a particular theme, perception, or ideology about the status of literature as a reflection of nation. In this respect, anthologies are indicative of Graham Huggan's comment that 'Australian literature has been constitutive, rather than been merely reflective, of the history of social relations in Australia' (vi). Because anthologies are a staple in many literature courses, it is crucial that we take into consideration their potential to challenge or reinforce normative constructs of nationhood through the selection and arrangement of texts.

Esther Prokopienko's examination of how Indigenous writings are chosen and organised in anthologies of Australian literature reveals the hidden power of anthologies and can be applied to the question of how Asian Australian writing is anthologised. Prokopienko's study considers how major anthologies operate to reinforce the idea of whiteness and perpetuate imperial ideals through several different processes in two key anthologies, *The Oxford Anthology of Australian Literature* (1985) and *The Macmillan Anthology of Australian Literature* (1990). In her analysis of these anthologies, she considers how the language used by editors in their introductions plays a crucial role in guiding how a specific anthology will function. An introduction addresses, among other things, the goals, parameters, and selection of the anthology, and helps to direct the reader to how the anthology's contents are valued. Prokopienko suggests that the framing of the introductions in these major anthologies obscures the existence of Aboriginal literatures and sustains a conventional understanding of white Australian identity. In addition to the rhetoric used in the introduction, Prokopienko stresses that how texts are arranged in an anthology is also important in determining how 'minority' literatures are treated. Some anthologies are arranged alphabetically or chronologically, while others place texts under specific groupings. Arrangements according to thematic groupings however, reveal the ideological basis for the editor's choices. At the end of her study, Prokopienko concludes that despite having been published decades after the death of the White Australia Policy, these anthologies 'continue

to be informed by White Australia Policy tendencies and construct a national image that is almost entirely white and controlled by a set of Anglo-centric imperial values' (Prokopienko 64).

The Oxford Anthology of Australian Literature (1985) and *The Macmillan Anthology of Australian Literature* (1990) can similarly be examined for how they represent Asian Australian writing. Even though there are many anthologies that deal with Australian literature, these anthologies are examined because of the perceived authoritative nature associated with its publishers. It is important to note that no additional editions of these anthologies have been released and they are now out of print. In addition to these anthologies, I will also examine the more recent publication, Macquarie PEN *The Literature of Australia* (2010), and a smaller anthology entitled *Australian Literature: An Anthology of Writing from the Land Down Under* (1993) in an effort to form a more coherent picture of where Asian Australian literature is located within the available canon of anthologised Australian literature.

Published in 1985, *The Oxford Anthology of Australian Literature* is the earliest of these anthologies. It is structured chronologically under four separate time periods. In their introduction, editors Leonie Kramer and Adrian Mitchell note the existence in Australia of a number of multicultural writers, but they fail to include texts by any Australian writers of Asian background in the collection despite the fact that Asian Australian writers were actively writing and publishing in this period.

The Macmillan Anthology of Australian Literature is only slightly more inclusive of Asian Australian writing. Arranged thematically, this anthology provides a reasonably comprehensive selection of work. The reader's first encounter with any mention of 'Asia' in the text is through an article published in *The Age* on 16 April 1855, which chronicles an Anti-Chinese public meeting. However, the only writer of Asian background whose work is included in the collection is the Malaysian Australian poet, Ee Tiang Hong (1933-1990). His poem, 'Coming To' (1986), describes the speaker's disorientation after moving to a foreign

land. At the end of the poem, when he is asked about his origins, the speaker uncertainly answers that he is from Perth, from Down Under. Ee migrated to Australia in 1975 from Malaysia because of the language policies issued by the Malaysian Government at the time.

A smaller and more thematic anthology, edited by Phyllis Edelson, is *Australian Literature: An Anthology of Writing from the Land Down Under* (1993). In comparison with the previous two anthologies, Edelson's introduction touches upon the issue of 'Asia' several times. The first of these is when Edelson explains the acute fear of invasion from the North by the Japanese army via the Pacific Ocean, which permeated Australia and the heart of Australians during the Second World War. The mention of Asia functions as a sort of footnote to highlight the changing relationship between Australia and the British Empire. The 'North' can also indicate the position of the Southeast Asian region, which is geographically located directly above Australia, echoing the terror of proximity. Edelson's observation serves as prelude to the events that would unfold only a few years later when Asian Australians were openly and publicly vilified by the One Australia Party.

Edelson also mentions Australia's increasing focus on the Asian region and describes this attention as an emerging trend. The Australian foreign policy, Edelson explains, is increasingly configured towards the Asian region. At the same time, Edelson also notes that Australia is becoming more and more multicultural. 'As a result,' she comments, 'the literature now includes Italian-Australian, Greek-Australian, and Jewish-Australian literature' (xxvi). Despite noting the significance of the 'Asian' presence for Australia and the multicultural future of Australia, however, Edelson fails to recognise Asian Australian voices in the selection of the texts included in the anthology. No Asian Australian writer is featured despite the fact that writers such as Mena Abdullah, Lillian Ng, Brian Castro, Ouyang Yu, and Ee Tiang Hong were already publishing at the time the anthology was released. Even though the anthology was never meant to be a comprehensive assessment, it skips over the agency and contribution of Asian Australian writers in Australian literary culture.

The Macquarie PEN *The Literature of Australia*, published in 2009, is the largest and most recent of the anthologies under examination. Edited by Nicholas Jose, this anthology functions as a recent update on the changing perspective of what constitutes Australian literature. Jose notes in the general introduction that the collaborators

> intend that the anthology show the phases of change and development in
> Australian literature, and in Australian society and culture more generally.
> … The anthology then implies different ways of being Australian as well as
> displaying different kinds of literary creativity. (2)

Jose's outline of what the anthology embodies is a departure from a mostly monolithic impression of Australian literature and identity that was present in its precursors. This anthology includes a significant number of Asian Australian writers, featuring works by eight. Thomas Keneally, whose foreword is included in the text, writes:

> So within this book one encounters a literary community unexpectedly
> diverse, one influenced internally by the nature of the *continent*, and
> externally by the reality of its position on the globe; an English-language
> literature arising as far as you could get from European wellsprings of
> language and sensibility, and at the terminus of Asia to the north, and
> with the breath of Antarctica on it from the south. It was always a place
> designed to produce a voice like no other. … The country became more
> and more racially diverse and more and more urbanised; and the
> American connection and the realities of Asia increasingly engaged our
> attention. (Keneally xxix-xxx)

In commenting on the different forces that have helped shape Australian literature as it is today, Keneally places emphasis on the contribution of Asian Australian writers to the construction of what he calls an 'open-ended' canon (xxxi).

The four different anthologies of Australian literature examined here give a glimpse into how far Asian Australian writing in Australia has developed since the dissolution of the White Australia Policy. What can be observed is that between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s, the work of Australian writers of Asian heritage barely received any recognition in three of the four anthologies that were examined. The large absence of Asian Australian writers in these anthologies belie their contribution to Australian literature. The 1980s and the 1990s saw Brian Castro publish six novels. Castro's first novel, *Birds of Passage* (1982), won the Australia/Vogel Literary Award that year. He also won the Victorian Premier's Literary Award in 1992 for *After China* (1992) and the National Book Council Award for *Stepper* (1997). Simone Lazaroo is also an Asian Australian writer who started to become active in the 1990s. Her novel, *The World Waiting to be Made* was published in 1994 and had won numerous awards, including the TAG Hungerford Award. During these two periods, writers such as Dewi Anggraeni and D'Ono also published novels. In 1993, the magazine *Westerly* also published the anthology *Westerly Looks to Asia: A Selection from Westerly 1956-1992*. Westerly has done a tremendous job in promoting Asian Australian writing as it has included a number of writers and essays on Asia in a number of issues and specials. This flurry of activity did not stop at writing and publishing. In fact, writing by Asians and of Asia was also a scholarly focus. The bi-annual Literature in the Asia-Pacific (AsiaPac) symposia series began in 1982 by the University of Western Australia and the National University of Singapore. The Macquarie PEN *The Literature of Australia* anthology helps remedy this by giving more visibility and recognition to Asian Australian writing.

This scant attention historically given to Asian Australian writing and narratives in Australian literary culture inspired the publication of the first Asian Australian anthology, *Growing Up Asian in Australia*, edited by Alice Pung in 2008. In her original introduction to the anthology, Pung comments that:

Throughout Australian literary history, Asians have often been written about by outsiders, as outsiders. Our outside identity oscillates between being a grave threat to white nationhood and being the obedient racial group least likely to offend, depending on the political climate. In 1996, a fiery-headed maiden declared in parliament that we were in danger of being 'swamped by Asians,' who 'have their own culture and religion, form ghettos and do not assimilate.' We were back to being the Peril again.

Many people continue to subscribe to a particular version of Australian history - one that spans only two centuries, and one that tries hard to cram everyone into a very rigid national narrative. Perhaps the reason Asian-Australians find it difficult to fit into this national narrative is that we rarely get to do the storytelling. (*alicepung.com*)

This struggle for Asian Australians to have their voices heard and to gain recognition in Australian literary culture characterises the nature of the Asian Australian literary cultural production. Given the preoccupation of Australian writers towards Asia, as seen in numerous literary responses to Asia and Asians and the increasing number of Asian Australian writers, the lack of attention given them in key anthologies is unbalanced and lopsided.

The lack of focus on Asian Australian literature is not only confined to anthologies but is also apparent in how Asian Australian writing is included as a subject of scholarly research and critical work. An example of this is found in *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, published in 2009. The text features Robin Gerster's thorough elucidation of how 'Asia' has been represented in Australian literature throughout the years. While Gerster's chapter sheds light on the history and changing the perception of Asia in Australian literature, the text devotes little to the emerging writing by Australians of Asian heritage. There is not

a separate chapter that explores the evolution of Asian Australian writing and the term 'Asian Australian' is part of this problem.

It is important to note that the term 'Asian Australian', while openly and widely used, is a loaded, complex, and problematic one. One reason for this is that it reflects the publishing industry's practice of selling a particular kind of experience or image to its readers. Celebrated fantasy writer, Ursula K. Le Guin, voices her thoughts about the limitations of any genre in a conversation with Pulitzer Prize Winner, Michael Cunningham. Le Guin states:

> But when the characteristics of a genre are controlled, systematized, and
>
> insisted upon by publishers, or editors, or critics, they become limitations
>
> rather than possibilities. Saleability, repeatability, expectability replace
>
> quality. A literary form degenerates into a formula. ... And we have the
>
> situation as it was from the 1940's to the turn of the century: 'genre' used
>
> not as a useful descriptor, but as a negative judgment, a dismissal.
>
> (*electricliterature.com*)

What Le Guin has observed is also reflected in how writing by Asians in Australia is examined and how "Asian Australian" is seen and currently promoted as a subgenre of Australian literature. Olivia Guntarik, in her study of the publishing industry's practice of promoting Asian Australian texts as 'migrant' or 'ethnic' literature, comments that Asian Australian writing explores broader themes than the rubric seems to suggest (Guntarik 5). Guntarik stresses that delineating and reducing the work of Australians of Asian backgrounds to the token migrant experience silences the creativity and the wider themes that these writers explore in their work. This thought is echoed by a number of Asian writers in Australia, such as Simone Lazaroo and Nam Le.

All of these critics suggest that the publishing industry has a homogenising effect in its marketing of particular genres. This may be true of the term 'Asian Australian' and its potential to perpetuate the idea of a singular cultural identity. This problematises how some

people associate or disassociate themselves from the label. Hence, discourses of identity concerning Asian Australian writing are often restricted to selected experiences concerning what 'Asian Australian' identity is all about. Deborah L. Madsen makes the point that a nationalistic lens is inadequate to capture the concerns of the Asian Australian community ("Asian-Australian Literature" 105). Some Australian writers of Asian heritage are Australian-born, but a number of them were born overseas, hailing from many different countries. Furthermore, Asian Australian writing is becoming increasingly transnational, moving beyond the confines of national boundaries.

The homogenising effect on the term 'Asia', which conflates a diversity of cultural identities, can be traced back to the nineteenth century orientalist habit of marking different countries East of Europe under the category called 'Asia' or the 'Orient. At the developmental stage of this research project, I, too, was wary of what the use of 'Asian Australian' could entail. There was fear that I might run the risk of limiting and entrapping the multifaceted narratives in my study simply by utilising the term. However, using the term 'Asian Australian' can also be used in a positive way. This is because the category can function as an act of empowerment in the struggle to claim a space within the Australian imaginary landscape.

Perhaps this is why the discussion surrounding identity and identification remain important in the study of Asian Australian literature. Wenche Ommundsen, in her article "'This Story Does Not Begin on a Boat": What is Australian About Asian Australian Writing?' (2011), argues that this preoccupation with identity politics marks Asian Australian literature as distinctively Australian. Given the proximity of Australia to the Asian region and its growing economic and political shift towards Asian countries, it is unavoidable to think that these factors might be partially responsible for such ambiguity.

The Concept of Place

Michel Foucault, in his essay "Of Other Spaces" (1986), predicted that after a preoccupation with temporality (history and time), the postmodern era would 'perhaps be above all the epoch of space' (Foucault 22). The notion of space is particularly relevant to the discussion of Asian Australian writing, given that today's globalising world is focused on shifting boundaries and porous ideas of place. Examining different Asian Australian experiences as informed by various cultural sites is an approach that can yield some insight into this exciting period. However, it is important to note the difference between 'space' and 'place' in this thesis. Yi-Fu Tuan suggests that the difference between the two concepts lies in 'meaning' which can be attained through our senses or through more indirect means such as symbolism (Tuan 6). In an increasingly globalised and digitised world, the study of 'place' may seem frivolous, as the idea of globalisation is contingent on the breaking down of borders in an easing of mobility and the free flow of information. However, while some borders are broken down in the age of globalisation, others are reinforced. In addition, space, place and meanings which are attached to them are always contested and negotiated. Australia, while embracing the global concepts of information and expression, is also monitoring border protection and immigration. The tensions between global freedoms and national security emphasise the ongoing importance of territory and space in a world which is opening up, and the continuing struggle of trying to negotiate concepts of national identities.

Given the long and varied histories of Asians in Australia, it is interesting to note how strongly spatial configurations tie in with these histories. Eudora Welty, in her essay "Place in Fiction" (1957, 1987), contends that place is important in literary work. She argues that 'place' is the 'named, identified, exact and exacting, and, therefore, credible gathering spot of all that is being felt' (122). Welty's description of 'place' and what it entails gives weight to the concept because it acknowledges how the concept of place is partially responsible for the articulation of our emotions and experiences. Tim Cresswell also makes

this point when he argues that place is 'a way of seeing, knowing, and understanding the world' (11). Cresswell, along with critics such as Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph, is part of a growing group of geographers who analyse how the study of place helps to explain human experiences in a wider cultural context.

Although Foucault, Welty, and Cresswell's comments underscore the important status of 'place' as a cultural and emotional construction, its configuration and position in literature can often be perceived as simply related to setting. However, closer reading of place in literary texts can offer readers and researchers avenues for more nuanced explorations of the construction and representation of identity and belonging. As Anti Randviir argues, space is not only a geographical reality but it is also a matter of everyday life practices and modes of communication (Randviir 140). The very act of naming place informs the ways in which different aspects of daily lives are negotiated and understood. This understanding of the linguistic construction of place reflects Paul Carter's explanation of place-naming in Australian spatial history is not only a geographical reality but it is also a matter of everyday life practices and modes of communication (Randviir 140). The very act of naming place informs the ways in which different aspects of daily lives are negotiated and understood. This understanding of the linguistic construction of place reflects Paul Carter's explanation of place-naming in Australian spatial history:

> A geographical feature is made no bigger than a page of writing. A
> calligraphic flourish is able, it seems, to plume out like an ocean current
> one hundred miles long. This metaphorical way of speaking is a pointer to
> the way spatial history must interpret its sources. It also indicates, concisely
> and poetically, the *cultural* space where spatial history begins: not in a
> particular year, nor in a particular place, but in *the act of naming*. For by the
> act of place-naming, space is transformed symbolically into place, that is, a
> space with a history. (*The Road to Botany Bay* xxiv)

With this in mind, examining representations of key cultural spaces in Asian Australian writing is important because the language of literature is a medium that speaks openly of personal, cultural, social, and political issues. Along with language, literature might be regarded as an art form that is spatial in nature.

Because this research project concerns the state of contemporary Asian Australian subjectivity in texts written by Australians of Asian descent, it is important to see place as a site that has the potential to highlight similarity, perpetuate the idea of difference, or draw attention to both processes simultaneously. Geographers such as Edward Relph and Tim Cresswell suggest that place plays into the politics of belonging and difference when binary divisions such as place and placelessness, belonging and exclusion, and the 'self' and the 'other' are juxtaposed. Places are contexts that provide people with the opportunity to learn social paradigms and cultivate ideologies and beliefs; they are the by-product of the power play within social structures. People in power sometimes create places so as to strengthen their hold on authority and safeguard their interests, and, therefore, place is the likely cause of many disagreements and conflicts.

These aspects of place make a compelling case for examining any national or regional category of literature in this context. In particular, Australian literature makes wide use of spatial concepts, especially relating to the country's natural landscape. Evident in some of the most recognised Australian writings are themes and motifs that describe particular landscapes such as the bush and the beaches. This preoccupation with space is something that is embedded in the country's history. During the early years of settlement, Australia was known as part of the Antipodes, as *Terra Australis Incognito*. Indeed, it is no surprise that Australian literature is shaped by the country's natural landscape. In recent times, the idea of space and place in Australia have also taken another form as different groups have competing claims over finite space. This assertion over 'whose' space it is has grown more acute in recent years as migration patterns have changed, with more migrants, including refugees and

asylum seekers coming to Australia. This ongoing struggle helps highlight different narratives of belonging and displacement in Australian society.

The notion of place is imperative in the construction of identities, particularly our understanding of contemporary identification, whether on a personal or collective level. Paul Carter's seminal text, *The Road to Botany Bay* (1987), engages with the idea of spatial history in Australia during the nineteenth century and how it contributed to the birth of a sense of nationhood. In particular, Carter explores how place-names help to build historical landscapes and, hence, attribute meaning to specific places. He encapsulates the power of landscape when he describes it as 'an object of desire, a figure of speech outlining the writer's exploratory impulse' (Carter 81). Although Carter's argument seems to steer towards more linguistic concerns of historical geography, there is no denying that his book highlights how place is important to a sense of identity.

In the Australian literary tradition, the concept of place has perhaps most powerfully and most familiarly been expressed through a direct engagement with landscape. The idea of 'the bush' is perhaps the most recognisable of all the iconographies of landscape in Australian culture. It is closely tied to Aboriginal groups and their connection to the land as an all-encompassing aspect of life which is both spiritual and material. The concept of the bush has also become a significant part of Australian nation-ness and nationalist imaginary. Lucy Frost in 'Escaping the Bush Paradigm' (2004) explains that as landscape, place played an important role in helping a group of six self-governing colonies transition into the Commonwealth of Australia (53). Benedict Anderson explains that when people see themselves as part of an 'imagined community', there should necessarily exist a sense of fraternity among its members because a community is 'conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship' (*Imagined Communities* 6). Although these British colonies shared geography, unlike (other) postcolonial nations, Frost argues that this did not give enough incentive to galvanise a collective action for nation-building. Instead, Frost comments that Australia

needed a shared story or 'brand' (Frost 54) to encourage people to identify themselves as members of a nation. This brand exists in the form of a nationalist narrative, and the bush provided this narrative with its plot, setting, and character. As the Australian bush has long been a muse for the writing of generations of Australian writers, it is unsurprising that different articulations of this nationalist narrative can be identified in the writings of writers such as Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson.

Constructions of the bush, whether in literature or in political rhetoric, can also be considered as a mnemonic or spatial metaphor for understanding Australia as implicitly white. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra note that from the start of the period of colonisation, the landscape has been an integral part of Australian cultural production and as a postcolonial nation, the iconography of the bush is still sustained by orientalist and imperial tendencies (xv). They argue that the image of the Bushman perpetuates the myth of the 'typical' Australian as white and male, and the Outback as the 'typical' space in which this figure resides.

Despite these imagery, Mishra and Hodge point out that the figure of the bushman and the image of the outback are not representative of Australians and Australia and are no more than an ethos. Of the bushman and the outback, they comment that:

> One of the paradoxes of his character that has been noticed yet strangely
>
> discounted is the fact that neither this character or his setting is nor has
>
> been "typical" in any useful sense. Australia is one of the most urbanised
>
> countries in the world, and this type would now constitute a small
>
> proportion of the populace that claims to find its true identity embodied
>
> by him. Even the belief that he was the norm at some time in the past is
>
> without foundations. At an optimistic estimate he could never have been
>
> much more than 15 per cent of the population. (xv)

Instead, most of the Australian population live at the fringes of the continent, near the ocean and away from the centre. The poet, A.D. Hope, captures this contradiction between myth and reality in his poem, 'Australia':

> And her five cities, like five teeming sores,
>
> Each drains her: a vast parasite robber-state
>
> Where second-hand Europeans pullulate
>
> Timidly on the edge of alien shores (17-20)

In the past, says Ann Curthoys, the Bush and the Outback in Australian writing were regarded as the 'true source' of Australian culture (23). Today, however, it is no longer relevant to rely on works by writers such as Lawson and Paterson as exemplifying an Australian sense of place. They are best enlisted to describe a mythic construction of identity that is heavily contested despite its appeal to the Australian imagination as demonstrated by its constant appearance in popular culture.

While there has been much research on how canonical Australian writers such as Lawson, Paterson, and Franklin utilise cultural space in their writing, the same attention has not been given to representations of cultural sites of place and belonging in the works of Asian Australian writers. Given the long and varied histories of Asians in Australia, it is important to uncover how different associations of space tie in with these histories. Spatial iconographies, including the natural landscape, appear as a recurring motif in a number of Asian Australian literary texts. Shirley Tucker, in her article "The Great Southern Land: Asian-Australian Women Re-view the Australian Landscape" (2003), comments that writers such as Mena Abdullah, Dewi Anggraeni, Yasmine Gooneratne, and Simone Lazaroo incorporate images of the landscape in their work. Tucker argues that these writers manage to reconfigure dominant attitudes of Australians towards Asian women and at the same time, destabilise boundaries of Australian identity. Tucker's examination of these texts also

highlights how narratives concerning the natural landscape are no longer the exclusive domain of the white, male Australian.

From the mid-1990s, Asian Australian literature and other forms of multicultural literature have challenged and destabilised the iconography of the nation. The destabilisation of nation also affects how the idea of 'home' and 'homeland' are perceived because of the change in global mobility. The politics of identity can no longer be confined to the fixed perceptions of place and nation, and in turn, people around the world are changing their notions of where their 'home' is located. The idea of home, whether factored geographically as a nation, as a dwelling space or a sense of belonging, is a concept that constantly reappears in Australian literature. Deborah L. Madsen's examination of home and hospitality in the works of Arlene Chai, Hsu-Ming Teo, and Simone Lazaroo illustrates how the developing canon of Asian Australian fiction in English expresses a dialectic between the homeland and the host land (Madsen 120).

Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Christina Szanton Blanc define transnationalism as "a process by which migrants, through their daily life activities and social, economic, and political relations, create social fields that cross national boundaries" (22). Transnationalism, hence, creates multiple consciousness and attachments within people who experience this phenomena and affects how identity and belonging are perceived. These challenges to the concept of 'home' are enhanced by the rise of transnational consciousness and an awareness of living in a globalised world. This shift towards a transnational consciousness is particularly evident in contemporary Asian Australian writing, where an awareness of movement between different notions of national identity is already strong. Michael Jacklin and Wenche Ommundsen term this as the 'transnational turn', where the focus is not only on Asian Australian literature, but also on Australian writing at large (Jacklin 1; Ommundsen 1). Because of this shift towards the transnational, it is important to examine how Asian Australian writers view ideas of selfhood and belonging. The transnational in

Asian Australian literature is not only the result of migration, such as experienced by a number of Asian Australian writers. It is also influenced by globalising forces that give ease to mobility and the sharing of information. Ommundsen notes that new categories such as diasporic writing and transcultural and transnational literature are new terms that are born out of the growing awareness that national and linguistic boundaries are no longer containers of these literatures (Ommundsen 2). The act of writing is no longer perceived to be restricted within these limits and, in fact, they transcend and permeate others. This shift towards a transnational consciousness, however, is not something new in Australian literature. It signals the examination of the interrelation between local, national, and international dimensions. Ommundsen contends that transnationalism does not only put both the 'Asian' and the 'Australian' aspects of 'Asian Australian' under examination, but it also affords researchers new ways to engage with the field of interest, mainly the issue of identity.

This thesis will engage all these issues by examining a selection of texts by contemporary Asian Australian writers through the prism of different representations of cultural space. The selection of texts is informed by decisions of region and theme. Firstly, the selection is limited to texts by writers who have East and/or Southeast Asian history and heritage because to some degree, the term 'Asian Australian' has a default implicit association with East and Southeast Asia. More importantly, these two regions were the focus of the 2012 *Australia in the Asian Century* White Paper, which brings renewed significance to the question of how Australia perceives its relationship with 'Asia', both as a neighbouring cultural environment and as an internal multicultural presence. The various Asian nations with which Australia will increase its engagement, according to the White Paper, include China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Indonesia. Nonetheless, it is not the endeavour of this thesis to represent all Asian communities in Australia or to provide a comprehensive study of all literary works by East and Southeast Asian writers. Instead, this study aims to capture a sense of how Asian Australian writers today are engaging with changing concepts of place and belonging.

It is important for me to point out, however, that my use of the term 'Asian Australian' within this thesis does not necessarily express how the writers identify themselves. Some writers might wish to disassociate themselves from a label they feel restrictive, while others might feel strongly about the continued use of the term. The choice to restrict the premise of the research is also influenced by the geopolitical and economical relationships Australia has with countries from these two regions. In a geographical sense, Australia's proximity to the region brings to the forefront the necessity for the country to count itself as being 'in Asia'. Directly north of Australia stands Indonesia, whose relationship with Australia at the time of writing is strained. Further up lie Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. Australia's relationship with East Asian countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea suggests the need to evaluate its influence on narratives of identity. Australia's long-standing role and reputation as a far-flung European outpost bears far less significance today than it did in the past. This shift is indicative of how Australia and its rising consciousness of being 'in Asia' are implicated in contemporary Asian Australian writing.

On another level, the selection of the texts included in this examination is based on the set of perspectives they convey on the shared themes of identity and belonging. The texts which are included here highlight different perceptions towards ideas of migration. Asian migration to Australia has been popularised by the perception that many Asians come to Australia as refugees of war. This perception of Asian migration as necessity is mythologised by the image of the boat and of the boat-people. Asian migration, however, is not always motivated by a need for refuge. While some of these texts do point out that some forms of migration are matters of necessity, other texts also seek to destabilise this perception by highlighting that Asian migration to Australia can also be a matter of choice. Asian professionals and students are often motivated by various promises of opportunity. This factor is also reflected in the fact that not all Asian Australians come from the same background. Some come to Australia as refugees and asylum seekers, some come as professionals, and others have been in Australia since its inception as a nation.

Another theme that these texts examine from different perspectives is the idea of intergenerational inheritances, and particularly the negotiations undertaken by a younger generation of Asian Australians in living with different cultures and cultural traditions. Inheritance of cultures is often set against the struggle between two or three different generations. For the older generation, who are often first-generation migrants, the need to preserve their culture and their children's continuation of it in a primarily Anglo society is a pressing concern. Cultural artefacts such as language and rituals are often stressed, and the responsibility is often placed on the shoulders of the younger generation. It is up to them to preserve these traditions. At the same time, the younger generation often has to juggle this responsibility with the expectation to succeed in this new country. Several texts in this thesis highlight this struggle between the older and younger generations.

Connected to this theme is the idea of 'difference'. The idea of difference can be perpetuated by culture, and it can also be perceived through the differences marked on our bodies. Being openly labeled as 'different' can have material effects. For some of the characters examined in this thesis, their 'difference' is experienced as liberating, while other characters find that their differences render their experiences as disabling and limiting. The issue of difference is also explored through ideas of the body, as its most immediate marker, within a framework of gender, sexuality, and empowerment. In different ways, these texts explore various articulations of what it is to be a human being, Asian, female, male, and gay, and whether or not these categories are limited by the boundedness of our physical bodies and the way in which we look.

The concept of privilege as something attached to 'whiteness' is also a recurring theme in these texts. The idea of 'whiteness' is often articulated through the positioning of white, middle-class, and straight people as people of privilege, putting people outside these denominations at a disadvantage. However, the privilege of 'whiteness' can also appear within Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) circles, as demonstrated by one of

the texts under discussion in this thesis. In this context, 'Asianness' is still seen as undesirable among the LGBT community, following ideas of difference through the body.

The first chapter will commence with the discussion of how the body, as the 'geography closest in' and our most intimate space, is narrated in Hsu-Ming Teo's novel *Behind the Moon* (2005) and Tom Cho's collection of anecdotes, *Look Who's Morphing* (2008). These two texts highlight how the materiality of our bodies functions as our most immediate, and socially coded, cultural space. Both works examine how the ways in which we look significantly determines how we are perceived, and how we perceive ourselves, in personal and socio-cultural settings. Teo's *Behind the Moon* follows the friendship of three friends from different cultural backgrounds as they go through life, each confronted by their own personal demons. Despite the malleability and permeability of their idea of personal identity as they grow and change, the ways in which these characters look, and the political and social meanings of their appearance, serve to trap them within more limited cultural constructs of race, gender, and sex. In contrast to Teo's novel, Cho's collection of short stories *Look Who's Morphing* breaks free from these perceived limitations. The work is a fantastical exploration of how the imaginative body can transform and be liberated from rigid constructs such as gender, ethnicity, and age, and can destabilise the very concept of identity.

In Chapter Two, this idea of identity as something played out in the 'geography closest in' is extended to the domestic home in an analysis of Alice Pung's memoirs, *Unpolished Gem* (2008) and *Her Father's Daughter* (2011). These fictional memoirs demonstrate the narrator's efforts to shape her own identity while trying to negotiate two vastly different cultures that play out within the space of the family home, and subsequently in the home she makes for herself. In trying to carve her own sense of selfhood, she tries to reconcile her life growing up as Asian Australian with her family's attempts at assimilation within Australian culture. Framed by stories and anecdotes about her mother and grandmother, *Unpolished Gem* focuses on the narrator's childhood, where she is only beginning to comprehend ideas of

difference and identity. In contrast, *Her Father's Daughter* is set in a time when the narrator is well into her adulthood. Narrated in a more sombre tone, this narrative follows the father's traumatic experiences during the civil war in Cambodia, how these experiences manifest in their life in Australia and how the narrator Agheare tries to accommodate her father's experiences with an understanding of herself. Domestic space in these two texts is represented as transitory spaces, each acting as a setting to highlight the evolution of Agheare's process in 'becoming' her own person. The power of memory, the socio-physical dimensions of home, and the continuing process of identity construction all intersect to reveal one girl's experience of existing within two cultural spaces.

Chinatown, the focus of Chapter Three, is an extension of this idea of the 'double' space of belonging. More specifically, this chapter is concerned with different articulations of Chinatown as a space that sits in between the personal domestic home and the more impersonal cityscape, and that functions as a place of belonging for people who identify with the various Asian communities that exist within the social body of Australia. *Growing Up Asian in Australia* (2008) comprises a set of different narratives from Asian Australians of diverse backgrounds. As an anthology it reveals how, as a cultural space, Chinatown is deeply entrenched in the imaginaries of Asian–Australian people not only as a material place, but also as a depository for recollection, the recovery of broken histories, and the negotiation of various identities for the people who inhabit and visit it.

Chapter Four focuses on a more 'foreign' territory, the cultural space of the Australian suburb. It explores how images of suburbia, as one of the most recognisable sites of belonging in Australian culture, function as a trope that serves to psychologically trap the female characters in Simone Lazaroo's *The World Waiting to be Made* (1994) and Siew Siang Tay's *Handpicked* (2004). Lazaroo's novel is a life narrative of a young Eurasian girl who grew up in 1960s Perth. Her story highlights how suburbia has the potential to become a site of new beginnings for the narrator's family. Yet, to carve out a favourable future requires them

to tread the complexities of race, class, and gender constructs. Similarly, Siew Siang Tay's story of Laila, a Malaysian mail-order bride, captures this ambivalent potential of the suburban space both to liberate and to entrap. However, while Lazaroo's text deals with the experiences of growing up within the Australian suburb, Tay's text explores the suburban fantasy through the eyes of the outsider who hopes to enter the 'Australian dream'. Laila, who comes to Australia for a better life with a man she hardly knows, discovers that her suburban dream is merely a fantasy and that she must find her own way to build a sense of her own place and future.

The final chapter moves beyond the boundaries of nationhood to examine ideas pertaining to transnational spaces and mobility. Nam Le's short story collection *The Boat* (2008) and Brian Castro's novel *Shanghai Dancing* (2004) are analysed as narratives of transnational belonging, represented through recurring motifs of the boat and the ocean. *The Boat* is a demonstration of how the image of the boat is reclaimed from its association with Asian migration. Instead, it is used in the collection as an articulation of different personal journeys that the characters undertake. *Shanghai Dancing* explores ideas of transnational belonging and identities through the use of the metaphor of the palimpsest, to highlight that identity is mutable. In both these works, the characters are global travellers who relinquish any single concept of national belonging, and for whom the concept of contemporary identity is plural, open, and fluid.

Chapter One

'The Geography Closest In': Narrating Bodies in Hsu-Ming Teo's *Behind the Moon* (2005) and Tom Cho's *Look Who's Morphing Now* (2008)

Introduction

'The body,' Adrienne Rich comments, is the 'geography closest in' (Rich 212). Rich's comment helps start this research project by examining how the body is perceived as the most intimate geographical space and as a 'micro' physical space of identification. Hsu-Ming Teo's *Behind the Moon* (2005) and Tom Cho's *Look Who's Morphing* (2008) exemplify this idea by using tropes of the body to illustrate different identities as ongoing performances. Teo and Cho are part of a growing group of Australian authors today who problematise and engage with the concept of the body in their texts. So, how is the body posited as 'place' in the texts of these writers?

Although initially the question 'what is a body?' seems to be a straightforward one, a number of ambiguities and contestations around its cultural meanings prevent us from pinning down what exactly a body is. The complexity of defining the body poses a challenge to scholars. Vicki Kirby refers to the body as 'terra incognita' (4), describing an unknown landscape, while Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift comment that the body is 'equivocal, often ambiguous, sometimes evasive and always contested' (6). Elizabeth Grosz, who has done considerable work on feminism and the body, attempts to define both the corporeal and metaphorical aspects of the body:

> By body I understand a concrete, material, animate organization of flesh,
> organs, nerves, muscles, and skeletal structure which are given a unity,
> cohesiveness, and organization only through their physical and social
> inscription … The body becomes a human body, a body which coincides
> with the 'shape' and space of a psyche, a body whose epidermic surface
> bounds a physical entity, a body which thereby defines the limits of

experience and subjectivity, in psychoanalytic terms through the

intervention of the (m)other, and ultimately, the Other or Symbolic

order. (Grosz 243)

Although these scholars have attempted to define the cultural complexities of the body, their attempts highlight the inadequacy of existing definitions. Grosz's definition is probably the least problematic one to date because it places emphasis on a nuanced view of the perceived 'natural' body. Perhaps, this is why many to whom the concept is central to their work refer not to what material the body is made of, but to how the body is constructed and portrayed. Furthermore, it is difficult to approach this question without reference to the tradition in the history of the West to consider the body as placed in a hierarchal relationship with the mind.

The relationship between mind and body has always existed in Western history, and yet, it is not until Rene Descartes' declaration, 'I am thinking, therefore I exist' (*A Discourse on the Method* 28), that the mind is given precedence and power over the body and human existence through consciousness is given emphasis. The impact of Cartesian dualism is not restricted to philosophical knowledge, however, but spills over into other forms of knowledge. An articulation of the mind/body dualism helps to clarify how the individual can be imagined as being located within the societal sphere (Cranny-Francis 28; Shilling 82). The privileging of the mind over the body parallels the Us/Other dichotomy that significantly shapes how people see themselves and how they relate to other people. An understanding of Cartesian dualism has entered into the theorisation of other kinds of dichotomy that structure the social sphere, including those of stable/unstable, white/black, man/woman, and masculine/feminine.

As feminist scholars have argued, the mind/body dichotomy is highly gendered in the Western tradition. The mind is often associated with what is deemed as masculine traits, such as disembodiment, rationality and stability. The body, however, is linked to ideas of the

'feminine', which are negative traits such as emotions, instability, and embodiments. Given this problematic configuration of the body and the female, feminist theorists have heavily contested and criticised the ways in which this prejudice is marked as 'natural'. In her book *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), Elizabeth Grosz justifies feminist efforts to reclaim and reconfigure the body away from phallocentric systems. She comments that 'where patriarchs have used a fixed concept of the body to contain women, it is understandable that feminists would resist such conceptions and attempt to define themselves in non-or extracorporeal terms' (14). Misogynist mockery of the female body, Grosz explains, continues to feed feminist suspicion and misgivings.

Cultural geography and its association with feminist theory may offer further accounts of the mechanisms behind this persistent dichotomy and the suspicion surrounding it. This is because the boundaries of male and female bodies are often politically tied to notions of fluidity and solidity. Robyn Longhurst's work on the pregnant female body demonstrates this notion by explaining how the female body is often understood as an insecure entity. In addition to this perception, the female body also has the tendency to leak and seep, which places further emphasis on the instability of bodily boundaries (Longhurst 2). This instability is illustrated by processes that are experienced by most women, including menstruation, pregnancy, and lactation. These types of bodies, Longhurst argues, are sometimes viewed with suspicion within phallocentric public spaces and this is why bodies, such as those of pregnant women, are restricted from entering and inhabiting certain public spaces. The attitude towards the body is closely tied to notions of spatiality and geopolitics. Nash and Pile observe that the body

> is both mobile and channelled, both fluid and fixed, into places. Not only
> does it concern the 'geopolitics' of the body but also the politics of
> connection and disconnection, of rights over the body, of the body as a
> site of struggle. (3)

As a site of struggle, the body is a geographical site in itself. Irrespective of how scholars have described bodies, there is a widely accepted association between notions of identity and physicality. This further feeds the myth that identities are singular, inborn, and fixed. Despite scholars doing considerable work on identity politics to counter this misleading and damaging concept, the archaic model of identity lingers. This model involves the materiality of the body, where ideas of sex, femininity, ethnicity, and race are politicised and regulated. Neil Smith best sums up the body and the space it occupies:

> The primary physical site of identity, the scale of the body is socially
>
> constructed. The place of the body marks the boundary between self and
>
> other in a social as much as physical sense, and involves the construction
>
> of a 'personal space' in addition to a literally defined psychological space.
>
> The body is also a 'cultural locus of gender meanings'…Not just gender,
>
> obviously, but other forms of social differences are constructed around
>
> the identity of the body. (102)

Hence, the body is perceived not only as a material object, but also a cultural entity that is imbued with a sense of power. At the same time, the body is not only an effect of these loci of powers, but also their agent.

The problematic relationship between identity and the body can be addressed through notions of performativity. Performativity refers to the way identities are sets of ongoing and evolving performances, and interior subjectivities. Judith Butler's noted work on gender, femininity and queer studies gives a holistic account of performativity. In her book, *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler outlines performativity as 'the reiterative power of discourse to produce phenomena that it regulates and constraints' (3) and that:

> gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts
>
> within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce
>
> the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being (43).

What this means is that repetitive semiotic discourses, whether through speech or gestures, gives birth to the performance of different identities. These identities are then reiterated and regulated by dominant cultures so as to create the illusion of being natural; hence, they serve a particular end within a hegemonic order.

Within this theoretical framework, repetition is one of the most important factors. This is because the exertion of power takes place through the constant reiteration of acting. A specific identity, therefore, arises not through an act of nature but through process and development. Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *The Second Sex* (1953) for example, believes that a 'woman' is not a natural existence but a construction, an idea. This echoes with Butler's notion of performative actions as cause for identity formation. Butler argues that our identities are the products of repeated actions and our ideas about the body are also based on social and cultural constructs (Butler 129). The boundaries and limits of the body can in this sense be conceived in terms of the social and cultural conventions they carry.

How, then, do the texts examined in this chapter represent the body? Hsu-Ming Teo's novel, *Behind the Moon*, offers the triangulated narratives of three primary characters. Each deals extensively with the boundedness of the body and how it feeds the rigidity of the surrounding social constructions of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and nationality. Through the materiality of the body, characters in this text experience various processes of identity construction, restraint, negotiation and contestation. These dimensions highlight the relationship between space and the body, where the body becomes the locus of socio-cultural and political experiences. In various ways, each of the characters feels trapped by the perceived limitations posed by their own bodies, despite the potential for malleability and freedom that their bodies offer them.

The second text examined in this chapter illustrates what the characters in Teo's novel are not able to do by imagining circumstances in which it becomes possible to break free of the restrictions imposed on the body. Cho's chaotic and satirical collection of

narratives, *Look Who's Morphing* (2009), demonstrates the inadequacies of current discourses to articulate the nature of the body and the identity it appears to project. Using the legacy of popular culture, Cho's text is the very embodiment of the body's multiplicity and malleability of contemporary identities. The text's narrator seems not only to outrageously transgress bodily boundaries, but also to question and dismantle traditional conceptions of 'body' and 'identity'. Although representations of the body in the text initially seem chaotic and to possess no discernible pattern, I argue that Cho's style materially expresses the very nature of identity and selfhood of our time: unfixed, unhinged, unstable and constantly in flux.

Restricted Bodies in Hsu-Ming Teo's *Behind the Moon*

The three primary characters of Teo's novel, *Behind the Moon*, are placed within a *bildungsroman* framework of youths struggling to understand and define themselves amidst the growing pains of adolescence. The characters in this text all experience their own individual hardships, set against normative ideas of identity. The idea of performativity is articulated by how each character's body is perceived by society and by themselves. Readers are confronted with the tension between the characters and the way these bodies are forced to occupy neat and bounded models.

Tien, a half-American and half-Vietnamese Australian, often identifies herself as a sort of hybrid or mongrel, not only because of the ambiguity of her physical appearance but also because of her different cultural affiliations. Her 'peculiar' Afro-Asian appearance and her life caught between two cultural worlds puts her at a crossroads where neither sphere is ready to fully accept her. A second character, Justin, is a young Singaporean Australian boy who suffers from the burden of fulfilling the filial role of the Asian son and struggles because of his Asian features. Intersecting ideas of culture, ethnicity and sexuality underpin Justin's narrative as he is unable to experiment with identities that break away from normative ideas of who and what he should be. A third character, Gibbo, seems to be the one with the most privileged social position of the three characters, at least in principle. He is the child of a

middle-class white Australian family and yet, he, too, is displaced from this privileged status because he is overweight. In a society that prides itself on a very high standard of 'masculinity', Gibbo stands at the periphery for not being able to meet these cultural standards. Tien, Justin and Gibbo are all considered outcasts at some point in the text. Their struggles intersect to form one large progressive narrative against expected normativity.

At one point or another in *Behind the Moon*, all of the characters take on multiple identities in order to meet the status quo. Justin struggles to hold on to his masquerade of the perfect Asian son, while at the same time attempting to discern and negotiate his 'closeted' gay self. Gibbo, on the other hand, struggles to reconcile his sense of self with the standard image of the white Australian male, prompting him to seek other forms of identification. With his Asian friends, he tries to seek a sense of belonging by embodying an Asian identity. Tien finds herself placeless as a result of her mixed cultural heritage. The ambiguity of her physical appearance positions her at the margins of two cultural groups. Tien's ambiguity also lends the discussion ideas about femininity within Chinese Vietnamese and Australian cultures as her appearance renders her apparently less attractive and less feminine. This prompts her to strive to embody a persona that reflects the standard of beauty and femininity within the two cultures. The bodily performances articulated by these three characters demonstrate the struggle to conform to certain types of socio-cultural hegemony. Ultimately, these 'othered bodies' threaten not only the balance of a perceived Australian cultural hegemony, but also the very conception of identity and the idea of a stable self.

The character that possesses the most acute awareness of his own body is Justin Cheong. From an early age, he knows all too well the implications that his body carries, as we first encounter him in the public bathroom. While painstakingly trying to void his bladder in private, a very young Justin is badgered by his mother, who waits on the other side of the cubicle door, to adhere to the hygiene standards that she practices. Bodily cleanliness is a heightened concept for Justin as he is certain that 'the truth … was to be found in toilets'

(Teo 1). This comment about cleanliness and the bathroom foreshadows the different and at times painful epiphanies about his body and his identities that he will experience throughout his life.

Here, Teo directs the readers' attention to the body and its link to the ambiguous space of the public bathroom. The public bathroom is an area where private and public expressions of the body collide. As Ruth Holliday and John Hassard argue, public bathrooms are 'complex spaces where bodies intersect, and where (again) the public and private coexist and intermingle within the space' (13). In elaborating on this potential for ambiguity, Olga Gershenson and Barbara Penner state:

> Public toilets are amenities with a functional, even a civic, purpose. Yet they
> also act as the unconscious of public spaces. They can be a haven: a place to
> regain composure, to "check one's face," or to have a private chat. But they
> are also sexually charged and transgressive spaces that shelter illicit sexual
> practices and act as a cultural repository for taboos and fantasies…Indeed,
> public toilets are among the very few openly segregated spaces in
> contemporary Western culture, and the physical differences between
> 'gentlemen' and 'ladies' remains central to (and is further naturalized by)
> their design. (9-10)

Readers are confronted with the motif of the public bathroom throughout Justin's narrative, where his experiences conflate the idea of the public and the private. The first encounter takes place in his childhood, when his sense of privacy and a sense of self are invaded and shaped by his mother Annabelle. Through the habits cultivated by his mother at a young age, the public bathroom is the place where Justin is exposed to the dichotomy between dirty and clean bodies:

She tapped urgently on the locked door with her wedding and engagement rings. 'Jay-Jay, don't touch anything you don't have to, you hear me? And don't sit on the toilet seat!'

'But I have to do a number two,' he protested.

The tapping on the cubicle door grew more frantic, like a woodpecker on amphetamines.

'You crouch, okay?' Annabelle cried. 'You listen to Mummy like a good boy. Don't you dare sit on the toilet seat. If you do, I'll wring your neck when you come out. You hear me? Are you sitting? Are you?'

Annabelle was hysterically clean. She disinfected the toilets in her house — every day and kept aerosol cans of air fresheners in her bathrooms. She was meticulous about personal hygiene. She showered twice a day, and after sex. (Teo 3)

The passage above highlights that Annabelle's almost Puritanical devotion to personal hygiene is not based solely on a distinction between clean and dirty bodies, but also derives from ideas of shame and honour. She believes that 'she could not endure the shame of strangers thinking she had fouled the toilet. She and her husband Tek lived their lives to one mantra: what would people say?' (Teo 2). Consequently, for Justin, the image of the clean body is closely linked with the image of 'the good boy' and gradually these conjoined frames of physicality and morality begin to permeate, spill into, and affect other spheres of his life. The logic is that a good boy is necessarily a 'clean' boy. By transgressing this image, Justin runs the risk of bringing shame upon himself and his family. Shame, Tomkins et al. argue, is the 'effect of indignity, of defeat, of transgression, and of alienation … felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul' (133).

The powerful link between the body and shame comes to hold a significant place in Justin's narrative. As a child, he has been taught that some bodily functions are considered dirty and that the public bathroom is associated with this dirtiness. It is the boundaries of this liminal space, set not only by his mother but also by society's normative standards on sexuality that Justin consciously decides to transgress. Within the space of the bathroom, male gay sexual desire becomes the axis of Justin's narrative. It is within this 'unclean' and public place that he comes to experiment with and seek the intimacy of sex, an activity his mother perceives as 'dirty'. His decision to cross the boundaries between the unclean and the clean is his moment of transition which sees his physical initiation into the gay subculture and community.

However, although this is a conscious decision, there still remains the anxiety of being discovered and the shame that such a discovery entails in a largely hetero-normative society. The moment in the public bathroom where he 'enters' into a gay identity highlights how by a very simple closing of the cubicle door, a public space is easily transformed into a private one. This transformation is marked as one of the geographies of sexuality within the text; hence, the cubicle becomes a metaphorical closet. Although scholars such as Steven Seidmen, Chet Meeks, and Francie Transchen consider it to be a metaphor that is fast becoming archaic, particularly in Western societies, the 'closet' still holds relevance for many people (10). In his book, *Closet Space* (2010), Michael P. Brown uses Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theory of the closet to explain the metaphorical and material state of the 'closet', a term popular in queer studies, using Butler's notion of performativity. Sedgwick argues that notions of sexuality should not be limited to binaries of heterosexuality and homosexuality (Brown 13; Sedgwick 68). Rather, a third notion of sexual orientation should come into play to contest the dichotomous system that society has constructed. Brown uses Sedgwick's theory to observe how the individual body is implicated in the conceptualisation and operationalization of the closet. As the closet exists in both empirical and metaphorical space, it is important to note the significance of context in performativity.

The space of the public bathroom as the proverbial closet foregrounds the notion that sexual orientation is a form of performative identity that needs to be hidden from the mainly hetero-normative public eye. Operating as a concealed stage, for a brief moment this space gives Justin the opportunity to resist normative power structures and explore and express his sexuality. Justin uses the codified symbolism of the bathroom to make himself visible to other people who are conscious of and are willing to participate in the same performance. At the same time, the bathroom stall also makes Justin and the other participant invisible to the prying eyes of those who view such performances as unwelcome and 'Othered'. Hence, the public bathroom functions as a metaphor not only of the closet but also as a landscape of desire. Paradoxically, it upholds and challenges dualist structures of the world as tropes of the public and the private, and regulates the visibility or invisibility of certain bodies. This sits in tension with Judith Butler's suggestion that the articulation of homosexual desire within liminal spaces, such as the public bathroom, threatens to undermine the conventions of the hetero-normative social system (Butler 52).

However, queerness is only a fragment of the performances that constitute Justin's continuing identity project. By not conforming to his society's expectations of sexuality, Justin is automatically displaced from the discourse of the majority. This alienation is made even more acute with the realisation that his Asian appearance restricts him from cultural spaces of both the gay community and mainstream society. His Asian heritage, Justin feels, impinges on his search for a sense of belonging within the gay community in Sydney. He observes that 'Gayness was an identity, and, if you got it right, it was a means of belonging. If you didn't, if you were an Asian gay, it was practically an oxymoron' (Teo 141). This oxymoron illustrates how Justin tries to construct himself in accordance to what he perceives as the essences of being gay and being Asian: 'He needed to acquire the accoutrements of a gay identity, but he didn't know how to go about it' (Teo 141). Ultimately, Justin's performance of his sexuality is not liberating for him. Not only has this type of performance

not met Justin's expectations, but it deepens his struggles to maintain his masquerade of the 'good Asian son'.

This performance of the 'good Asian son' takes place within the private space of home. Continuing the interplay between the public and the private, Justin's bedroom is a closely structured stage for such a performance. Over the years, he carefully transforms the space of his bedroom into a spectacle in order to maintain his masquerade as the filial Asian son. The sporting trophies, *Gallipoli* poster, and textbooks are all artefacts that are carefully displayed to exhibit this identity to his parents and to his friends. In a way, these props demonstrate to observers and to the audience (especially his parents, Tek and Annabelle) that Justin is fitting in; that he is adjusting well to Australian culture and is the hardworking and filial son they expect him to be. It is with a private sense of irony that Justin uses the private space of his bedroom as a sort of public display of these identities. Robyn Morris suggests that Justin's careful construction of this façade contradicts the 'inner turmoil and he is described as a boy without essence, somewhat akin to the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz*' (160).

This similarity with the Tin Man illustrates how a sense of belonging remains elusive for Justin. This is not only because homosexuality is represented as something that is socially marginalising in the text, but exclusion also exists within the Australian gay community. While being Asian seems to be in direct conflict with being gay, it is surprising that being Asian in the Australian gay community might also pose a problem for Justin. The exploration of his sexuality in gay bars and nightclubs has revealed that even within the gay community in Australia there exists a sense of racial segregation and hierarchy. In this space, his Asianness is undesired: 'All he knew was that he didn't look right because he was Asian. He did not have the right clothes or hair, or the right body type' (Teo 142). Clearly, Justin's attempt to fit into the gay community and find a partner for himself feels to him like an exercise in futility, as his Asian features mark himself as 'different' from other gay men.

Racism and the politics of exclusion exist even within the gay community. Chong-Suk Han in his study of race and the gay community in the United States argues that gay men of colour suffer discrimination in both their respective cultural communities and the gay community (Han 52). He explains that whiteness is everywhere in the gay community. Whiteness is a powerful privilege because as Han points out, it is 'everywhere but nowhere in particular … And this whiteness is imposed from both outside and inside the gay community' (Han 52-3). Pitted against such a pervasive sense of whiteness, Justin decides that something needs to change in this equilibrium, and that he is the one that needs to change. This realisation leads to a concerted effort to fit in, as Justin makes changes to his appearances and his habits:

> Justin was lonely. He longed to be in a relationship. He furtively bought gay magazines and responded to classifieds. Nobody got back to him when he identified himself as Asian. He began to go to nightclubs in Darlinghurst. They were easier than bars, he figured, because they would be dark and his Asianness might be less obvious … In the pulsing press of anonymous bodies gyrating in a nightclub he could pretend that he actually belonged to this community. (Teo 149)

At work in the passage is the discussion of how the gay community in Australia is also culturally and ethnically marked. Stereotypes of Asian male bodies have always existed, particularly ideas of feminisation and eroticisation. In some cases, the Asian male body is seen as less masculine and more effeminate than the bodies of other ethnic groups. Murray Drummond, in his study of Asian gay men, argues that Asian gay men struggle to live within a predominantly white, heterosexual society, especially when ideals of Australian masculinity are contextualised (Drummond 294; Niels 264). Within the LGBT community, there is also great pressure on gay men to look a certain way and adhere to certain aesthetic ideals. Asian men find it difficult to adhere to these standards because of the way they look (Ridge, Hee, and Minichiello 45-49). The great emphasis on aesthetics in this culture gives rise to body

image issues among Asian gay men and Justin's struggle with the Asianness of his body is symptomatic of this culture.

The non-discriminating darkness of the nightclub provides a cover for Justin's Asian appearance. Within this space, he becomes temporarily anonymous, rendering him acceptable to the wider gay community. Didier Fassin believes that 'whether made visible (in the case of Blacks) or kept invisible (in the case of Whites), the body is the site of the racial experience' (420). Gay nightclubs serve as exclusive and private spaces for gay men to publically meet other gay men. They are significant as places for gay identity construction and provide real and imagined corporeal spaces for gay men to give expression to their sexual orientation. This is in accord with William Norton's observation that these types of landscapes underscore one of two key complexities of sexuality and gender:

> Analysis of gay landscapes often highlight the fact that such areas do not
>
> necessarily welcome all gay people, but perhaps only those who are
>
> deemed appropriate in terms of other identity markers, such as ethnicity
>
> and class. (310)

Justin's realisation of his 'abnormality' is further compounded after meeting Jordie, a Malaysian pianist who Justin dated in secret. By observing Jordie's deflective behaviour in front of his family, he sees the schizophrenic nature of gay Asian men including himself. Again, this refers to the carefully constructed identity of the 'good boy' that Justin projects publically. The maintenance of this identity invokes anxiety and inner turmoil as Justin is inexplicably afraid that his masquerade will be revealed. Outside of the gay subculture, homosexuality is still held in contempt and with suspicion within both the largely conservative white Australian and Asian communities because being gay is being in conflict with ideas of the 'ideal man' in both cultures. There still exists stigma against gay men, where they are perceived as unnatural and un-masculine. Within mainstream Australian society,

male identity is typically idealised as white, masculine and straight. These characteristics have been ingrained and institutionalised within the psyche of the nation.

One of the strongest images that perpetuate this white, middle-class male identity is the story surrounding the heroism of the ANZAC troops in the Battle of Gallipoli during the First World War. The significance of the ANZAC experience in Justin's narrative can be seen in the way Peter Weir's film, *Gallipoli* (1981), is used to portray ideas of Australian masculine identity. Based on the Dardanelles campaign during the First World War, the film is a coming-of-age tale of young Australian Diggers and their futile efforts at the Battle of the Nek. The film depicts an important part of Australian history and the makings of an Australian national mythology. Marek Haltof argues that the film portrays a stark duality, particularly between Australia and Europe through emphasis on the Australian landscape, innocence and isolation (Haltof 28). The notion of self-identity, which Haltof identifies as an Australian myth, is conceptualised through these ideas, particularly through meaning derived from the landscape, which is characteristic of period films of the New Wave. In short, Weir's film serves to consolidate existing ideas of Australian national identity and nationhood. For Justin and Tek, *Gallipoli* represents two different things: Tek sees it as a good sign that his son is assimilating well into the Australian culture, while Justin views it as a revelation about his sexual identity:

> He was twelve years old when he first wondered whether he was gay. He
> sat in history class watching a video of Gallipoli, staring at the Anzac
> soldiers swimming naked in the translucent green water while shells
> exploded all around them. He was mesmerised. He could not take his eyes
> off those lithe white male bodies rippling in the sea, suspended in a water
> ballet of blood and carnage. At the end of the movie, his heart pounded
> painfully against his chest and his throat was sore with supressed tears at
> the sight of Mark Lee frozen at the moment of death. Later, he hunted

down a poster of the film and Blu-Tacked the picture of Mel Gibson and

Mark Lee to his bedroom wall. His father nodded approvingly. It was a

sign, Tek thought, that Justin was growing up an Australian. (Teo 5-6)

Despite the significant impact Gallipoli has had on Justin's realisation about his sexual orientation, the film's ideas of mateship and whiteness leave little room for othered representations. These ideas contrast starkly with Justin's ongoing struggle to make sense of his Asianness and his sexuality within a predominantly white and heterosexual reality.

The accrual of a gay identity is not something that is simply pinned down, as can be seen through Justin's struggle to understand what it means to gay and Asian. When Justin decides to 'come out' of the proverbial closet and identify himself as gay in front of relatives, the reactions of his extended family, at least, are typical and expected of a hetero-normative society. With only a misplaced understanding of homosexuality, the family equates being gay with many enduring stereotypes, such as femininity, drug abuse, illicit sex change, and AIDS. Instead of welcoming and supporting Justin, their ill-conceived notions, although uttered with great concern, unconsciously demonise and further alienate him.

The publically televised Mardi Gras pride parade in Sydney is also demonstrative of how homosexuality is perceived in Justin's family. The annual parade is a medium for the gay community in Australia to claim a space for itself. However, the parade is also a political act, where notions of normative heterosexuality are contested in several ways including drag dressing. Annabelle, who is scandalised at what she sees, attempts to shield Justin from images of the parade on television:

Worst of all were the annual televised snippets of the Sydney Gay and

Lesbian Mardi Gras. The moment she caught a glimpse of those floats and

feathers, the glittering costumes and all that prancing flesh, she was riveted.

She would stand there, paralysed with prurient shock, the remote control

in her hand, repeating in fascinated horror, 'Ai-yo, look at all those hum

sup lohs!'… Annabelle noticed that her son was in the living room. She

pushed him out of the room and warned him, 'Don't look, Jay. Dirty like

anything.' (Teo 7)

Annabelle's reaction towards the Mardi Gras parade mirrors the fears and anxieties plaguing

people who oppose homosexuality. This trepidation is motivated by the imagined 'pollution'

and corruption of normative standards of morality. Annabelle and Tek view homosexual

visibility in the public media as something undesirable and dirty and they believe that by

protecting their son from images of the parade, they will be able to 'protect' him from

'becoming' homosexual.

Justin's sense of dislocation stems from the conflict between ethnicity, sexuality, and

Australianness, all of which seem to accumulate into a schizophrenic existence. The sense of

placelessness that Justin experiences is parallel to Gibbo's own misgivings about his body.

For Gibbo, his angst is rooted within the reality that his non-mesomorphic body places him

in. His obesity de-privileges him from identifying with and conforming to normative ideas

of Australian identity, which to a certain extent revolve around the ANZAC myth and the

image of the 'digger'. Robert A. Hall contends that war memorials built in honour of diggers

reflect a white view of Australian war efforts (58). Until recently, the rhetoric surrounding

Gallipoli and the ANZAC myth had largely been exclusionary, which erased or overlooked

involvement by Aboriginal and minority diggers from the national imaginary. Suggesting an

alternate memorial for Aboriginal and minority diggers, Hall explains that:

visitors to the Australian War Memorial are unlikely to come away with the

belief that Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (not to mention other

visible minorities within the Australian community, like Chinese

Australians) have a legitimate part in the digger legend. The galleries of the

War Memorial contain few reminders of the military service or Aborigines

and Islanders, though, to be fair, their number and prominence is slowly

growing. (58)

The ANZAC tradition is one that has been institutionalised in remembrance days, the enactment of memorials and monuments to mark the sacrifice of the soldiers, and yet, it cannot be denied that this tradition and the myth surrounding it is exclusive and excluding. Together with the image of the 'Aussie Bushman', the ANZAC tradition helped define this ethos of masculinity. In his article, "War and Masculinity in Twentieth Century Australia" (1998), Stephen Garton explains that despite the masculine ideals being challenged in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Vietnam War, the rhetoric of manhood continues to be framed around the image of Australian diggers, which sustains the standards of masculinity among white Australian men (86).

R.W. Connell terms this social construction 'hegemonic masculinity', which he describes as 'the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women' (77). The continuous perpetuation of the white ANZAC myth helps to embody a perceived Australianness, a process which is comprised of many attributes such as mateship, masculinity, and mutual white egalitarianism (Stockings 87). Here, it is clear that those who do not embody these attributes and ideals that make up part of a 'definitive' Australian male identity are excluded from its ethos.

How, then, is this sense of Australian masculinity characterised? What are the factors that help construct the embodiment of the Australian male? Rolf Romøren and John Stephens believe that the elements that encapsulate the Australian hegemonic masculinity include heterosexuality, the sense of mateship, duty, athleticism, misogyny, and emotional stoicism. Australian masculinity is, therefore, a triangulation between images of the Bushman, the ANZAC myth, and athleticism (Romøren and Stephens 216-32). Although Gibbo is of

Anglo Australian heritage, he does not fit into these ideals. Like Justin, the sense of alienation that he feels because of his failure to adhere to standards of Australian masculinity is aggravated by his awareness of the undesirability of his body. This exclusion is made worse by his own reluctance to participate in sports and athletics to project a sense of 'manliness'. His body and his lack of athleticism are key reasons why a number of people, including his own father, view him as lacking masculinity.

The theme of hegemonic masculinity overshadows Gibbo's narrative and follows him throughout his childhood and adolescence. This struggle to become more 'manly' is heightened by his father's experiences during the Vietnam War. Having a father who is the representation of normative standards of Australian masculinity reifies Gibbo's lack of self-worth. For Bob Gibson, as well, having a son who goes against his ideals of masculinity is a constant source of failure:

> By the time he was fourteen, even Bob gave way to the inevitable. 'Bloody girl,' he snorted as he stored the sporting equipment away in the attic with forbidding finality. How was he going to get to know his son without the aid of a ball shuttling effortlessly between them, knitting them together in blokey camaraderie? ... Without sport, how did you touch on subjects like sex, drugs and career choices? ... You couldn't. You were shipwrecked conversationally and then there was a whole lot of awkwardness between you and your son. Love him as much as you did, he didn't seem a proper man, a real Aussie. (Teo 98)

Bob Gibson's idea of what constitutes a 'proper man' and a 'real Aussie' seem to be closely associated with his role and responsibilities as a father. With Gibbo unable to embody these important characteristics, the relationship between father and son soon becomes distant and strained. In a world where these standards are fiercely adhered to, Gibbo's failure to meet the requirements of hegemonic masculinity also reflects Bob's 'failure' as a father

because it is his 'duty' to pass down these traits and ensure that his son grows up to be a 'proper man' and a 'real Aussie'.

The criticism of the notion of Australian hegemonic masculinity forms a large part of the narratives of Justin and Gibbo. Gibbo's perception of his body as something revolting is continual, and is reinforced, not only at home, but within important social spaces such as the playground and the school. The playground does not only function as a play environment, but also exists as a racialised and gendered landscape that aids in the perpetuation of difference and Otherness. Being obese, and therefore viewed as unmasculine and effeminate, renders Gibbo as the undesirable Other. The increasing scrutiny and criticism of the body in today's fat-phobic society positions endomorphic bodies as transgressors of gendered and politicised bodies, even though people rarely ever fit the body image that their society covets. Bell and Valentine explain that 'fat is seen as a sign of moral and physical decay. Fat people are stereotypically constructed as undisciplined, self-indulgent, unhealthy, lazy, untrustworthy, unwilling and non-conforming' (36). Longhurst explains that ideas of thinness and fatness are binary constructions which exist on a continuous spectrum (249). Within popular perceptions which are constructed by the imagery of fatness, the spaces that Gibbo occupies seem to assist the decline in his sense of worth and to demonise him in society's eyes. His position within the childhood space of the playground, with its corporeal and symbolic landscapes, reinforces Gibbo's sense of disempowerment. Despite the racial and social segregation of the playground: 'in their casually racist playground there were the skips who played rugby, the wogs who played soccer, the slopes hung out at the basketball courts' (Teo 61) — Justin, Tien and Gibbo are marked outside these circles, the 'multicultural rejects' (Teo 61), as they used to call themselves. With each other, they carve for themselves their own social space to compensate for the lack of acceptance and belonging in others.

What is more telling is that Gibbo, like Justin, is trapped within the identities he is uncomfortable with. Both of them are the only child in their families who inherit the burden

of their parents' expectations. While Justin is successful in maintaining his 'good son' masquerade, Gibbo struggles to present himself as a son his parents are proud of. It is interesting to examine Justin and Gibbo together. Their bodies, which have dictated major aspects of their lives, seem to have been constructed to contrast with one another. Justin is described as thin and lanky, whereas Gibbo is heavy. At the same time, despite the differences in their bodily shape, their narratives question the power of the white male body in Australian society and of social perceptions surrounding the 'appropriate' body and ideas of masculinity.

This pressure to conform to the white male body, which serves as the 'axis of its story' (Morris 156), forces Gibbo to reconsider his social position of a white, middle-class male. Instead of trying to become the person his father wishes him to be and failing, Gibbo develops a desire to become Asian like his friends. To develop an Asian persona, he adjusts his speech patterns to adopt Chinese phrases and Chinese mannerisms: "'*Hi-Yah*, you *chee sin lo*,' Gibbo said, laughing"' (Teo 55). Gibbo's appropriation of the Chinese culture and his attempts to become Asian even go as far as constructing a fictional Chinese heritage and history for himself. Discriminated against because of their Asianness, Justin and Tien seem to be confused about why he would ever want to be Asian. The acceptance shown by his friends' families leads Gibbo to believe that embodying or appropriating Chineseness is a strategy which is desirable. His social vulnerability seems to be partiality remedied as he

> desperately wanted to be Asian while Justin and Tien tried so hard not to
>
> be. Even as Justin had speech lessons with Gillian so that he could talk like
>
> a ponce and Tien tried her best to imitate Bob's ocker Strine, Gibbo was
>
> busy patterning his speech after Annabelle Cheong's Singlish. (Teo 56)

Gibbo's experience is not an isolated one because it also appears in Justin and Tien's narratives. Both Tien and Justin try to distance themselves from their heritages by undergoing stark physical transformations in order to live within the comfort and safety of a community or group. When he leaves his parents' home to live elsewhere, Justin tries to

morph himself into what he deems to be an acceptable image for the gay community. Tien, too, tries hard to make herself forget the ambiguity of her heritage and birth. She attempts to embody a persona called 'Tina', Bob Gibson's moniker for her. In this context, we are shown how performativity and image construction are powerful processes that make individuals believe in the image they project.

Unlike Justin and Gibbo, who struggle with the stereotypes that attach to their physical appearances, Tien does not seem to fit any stereotypes. Instead her identity is contingent on other types of identification. Gibbo comments that although Tien is supposed to be from Vietnam, she does not 'look properly Asian' (Teo 7) and her skin colour is described as 'the warm colour of a piece of KFC chicken' (28) in the winter, and 'a crisp dark shade of honey-soy chicken wings' (Teo 28) during summer. Gibbo's thoughts are also shared by her maternal relatives as it is difficult for them to accept a person who looks so different from themselves. Sara Ahmed, in her study of the differences in skin colour, notes that the difference found in the colour of skin is unstable and is dependent on various establishments of identification and difference (27). Tien is considered an anomaly within not only the dominant Australian discourses; her appearance also renders her out of place within the East and Southeast Asian communities. As the daughter of an African American soldier and a Vietnamese mother, Tien appears to embody the physical combination of these two ethnicities.

In a society where binary constructions still have influence over the way we think and in daily lives as a part of simplifying our understanding of the world, people who do not appear to fit or identify with certain structures would automatically become an 'Other' for both sides of a binary. The episode on the tram in Adelaide involving Tien, Justin, Gibbo and a young man, exposes the mechanism behind this structure:

Tien looked bored and Gibbo felt sorry she was being left out. He leaned

towards her and explained, 'Justo says the smell will kill us.' She ignored

him and smiled at Justin.

'What are you lookin' at?' the young man demanded. 'Hey! I'm talkin' to

you. Bloody chink'

'Nut case,' Justin whispered to Tien. 'We'd best ignore him.'

'What're you fuckin' whisperin'? You talkin' bout me? You think yer

fuckin' better'n me, you fuckin' slope? Fuckin' slanty-eyed boatie. Bloody

fish-breath gook' …

Tien could bear it no longer. She said with exaggerated politeness, 'Excuse

me. I should point out that he doesn't wear glasses and he's actually not

from Vietnam. I'm the Vietnamese one here and I can assure you it's not

really possible to be a commie bastard and a boatie at the same time.'

'I wasn't talkin' to you,' he snarled. 'You want me to start on you? Is that

what you want, you fuckin' boong? You want me to smash this bottle an'

cut ya? Go climb back up your tree and take fuckin' four-eyes with ya.'

(Teo 64)

The exchange between Justin, Tien, and the man highlights two major points. One

is that a person with Asian heritage, such as Justin, is more likely to be discriminated against.

This exchange in the tram highlights Australia's longstanding anxiety towards Asians. The

unease over the arrival of refugees by boat and the increase in the number of Asian

immigrants is evident: the man associates Justin with Vietnamese refugees, even though the

circumstances surrounding Justin's arrival in Australia are different. Secondly, this exchange

shows that there still exists continued discrimination against members of Aboriginal

communities. Due to the colour of her skin, the man believes Tien to be a member of the

Aboriginal community, even when Tien openly declares her Vietnamese heritage. The existence of pockets of continued racism against Indigenous Australians highlights the dark history surrounding the treatment of Aboriginal tribes in Australian colonial history. Because of her dark skin, the man mistakes Tien for an Aborignal person and she is also subjected to the same verbal abuse.

The scene in the tram highlights what Frantz Fanon describes as 'blackness'. In his essay, "The Fact of Blackness" (1968), Fanon gives an account of how a seemingly simple and uncomplicated observation from a white child, who commented on the colour of his skin, affected his self-worth in an act he calls 'crushing objecthood' (109). According to Fanon, his black identity is determined by his body; first as an object of curiosity and fascination, and later as an object of fear. As Fanon asserts, 'blackness' is not self-constructed, but it is a dual process that involves both physiology and socio-historical context. Within a white hegemony, his skin colour becomes the pre-determination of who he is as a person. Ashcroft et al. expand on Fanon's theory by suggesting that 'blackness' is similar to a 'uniform'. It is used as a means of separating the black man from the crowd (292).

This concept of the body's external skin as a 'uniform' and as a marker for otherness is a major part of the exchange on the tram in the novel. Justin, Tien and Gibbo's encounter with the white man shows how the man refers to the way they look to separate them from the majority: an Aboriginal person (and deemed less human, in reference to the comment about the tree), and the Asian, the non-Australian and usurper. Despite the abusive and public nature of the exchange, it is notable that nobody else in the tram comes to help Tien and Justin. Even Gibbo, their friend, abruptly stops his appropriation of Asian culture and subconsciously hides behind the privilege of whiteness and anonymity when the racist tirade takes place.

The colour of Tien's skin and her appearance call into question matters surrounding ideas of gender, beauty, and femininity in the novel. These ideals exist within two different

standards in the text: Vietnamese Asian and White Australian. Tien constantly struggles to negotiate between the two standards and later realises that she can never reach or satisfy either of these. This also reflects the level of dissatisfaction people feel about their bodies in today's society, where body image is a large part of consumer culture. This rise in dissatisfaction is attributed to the standard of beauty that is portrayed and perpetuated by mass media and popular culture. Socio-cultural standards of beauty have evolved, but the fact remains that people who do not fit or conform to these beauty standards are perceived as both unattractive and undesirable.

Popular culture is not only the means in which ideals of beauty are perpetuated, but it is also the medium in which certain identities are represented. Princess Diana's televised funeral becomes a pivotal point in the text as an example of how performative identities and symbolism are articulated in popular culture and society. At the news of Princess Diana's death, the families decide to gather and watch her funeral procession on television by hosting a dinner party. The importance of Princess Diana and her funeral in the novel points to a more widely recognised public/private performative interplay of identities. Popularly known as the 'People's Princess', Princess Diana was an international royal celebrity. At a time when public opinion of the monarchy was at a low point, her popularity surpassed anything British Royalty had seen in a generation. Princess Diana's public image, which created media frenzy wherever she went, can be perceived as a set of performances.

At one end of the scale, Princess Diana was celebrated as a charitable figure who defied royal protocol and mingled freely with the people. But, at the same time, she was also pilloried for enforcing new forms of imperialism and white femininity, which were perpetuated through media and popular culture. White femininity is a powerful ideology because it has the power to regulate and control how women should look and behave regardless of their background. Given enough time and through repetitive discourses, white femininity can be perceived as a natural order. At the end of Princess Diana's marriage to

Prince Charles, however, details of her private life were exposed and became material for public spectacle. Her life was laid bare for all the world to see and judge. Behind the public image of Princess Diana, the world saw an emotionally fragile woman who struggled with insecurities about her body and the burden of her responsibilities. Media coverage of Princess Diana's private life and ultimately her funeral perpetuates the notions of her public image and the ideals of white femininity that is projected.

Tien comes face-to-face not only with the beauty standards of white femininity, but also with standards of Asian beauty The construction of Asian female beauty is based on several defining features, including the fairness of one's skin. Eric P.H. Li et al. argue that 'whiteness' as a beauty standard in Asian cultures is influenced by both traditional and Western ideologies and is now an essential part of Asian consumer culture (444). This desire to have fair skin has directly influenced the increase in the number of products and advertising targeted to play on these insecurities. In Tien's narrative, many characters of Asian background have made numerous remarks about how dark and unattractive her skin is. These remarks help shape the sense of dissatisfaction Tien feels about her own body. It is no surprise that this standard of beauty is also evident in the text and is one of the sources of Tien's angst about her body. She worried about:

> her unsuitability to be Justin's girlfriend because she was two years older
> than him and she did not look sufficiently Asian.

> Tien realised that she was too dark-skinned. She took to wearing hats and
> long sleeves in summer, but it didn't stop Annabelle from exclaiming,
> 'Wah! How come you so dark one when your mummy so fair?'

> 'Oh.' Tien could see the pity and disbelief in Annabelle's eyes and she was
> angry with Annabelle and everyone else like her who kept twisting her
> mongrel roots around her neck. Most of all, she was angry with Linh for
> having been a bar-girl who knew lots of American GIs—even black ones!

An awkward adolescence made Tien unforgiving in her rigid morality. (Teo 71-2)

Clearly, this angst and dissatisfaction with her body has a significant impact on how she perceives herself within the construction of the 'female' and femininity. Implications that she is less feminine are contained repeatedly in a series of comments about the attributes she lacks. To cope with the negativity towards her body, Tien sets up a series of responses as a self-defence mechanism, particularly by developing a sense of pride of her African American culture. Tien is also forced to confront the materiality and metaphorical aspect of her femininity. After marrying Stan and moving to America, Tien attends spiritual classes centring on the Gaia Goddess. There, she is forced to have a closer self-examination of her genitalia as part of the process of re-wombing practised in the class

> She is the sacred mystic womb of the universe which birthed Pontus and
> Uranus and all that exists, the transcendent void of knowing, being and
> feeling beyond your worst nightmares and wildest hopes. A chaotic
> alchemical interconnectedness of feminine mystery. The supreme joy of all
> genitalia, the mother of all pleasures, she is Gaia. She is Earth Goddess.
> She is you! When you discover Gaia, you discover your Self. [Italicised in
> original] (Teo 310)

The passage describes the spiritual aspect of what the instructor of the class wants to awaken in those who attend, for them to discover a sense of self. The next passage illuminates the moment of Tien's examination of her markers of her sex:

> After fifteen minutes they were given razors to shave their pubic hair off.
> Mirrors were handed out for them to squat over so that they could look at
> their vaginas and confront their femaleness without flinching in fear or
> embarrassment. Tien was astonished at how much she resembled a
> plucked chicken. She was acutely uncomfortable. She cast her mind back

to one of Stan's anatomy textbooks and steadied herself by labelling what

she saw: mons pubis, labia majora and minora, vestibule of vagina. (Teo

312)

Judith Butler states that sex is something we create through discourse, even when we take the more biological aspect of 'sex' into consideration, and she proposes the notion that sex does not exist before gender (Butler 1990). Butler's argument about sex as a social construction focuses on the binary relationship between the female and the male. Genitalia problematise this binary, especially when we take into account those who possess both sets of sex organs, or under other extreme or difficult circumstances, have had a loss of those organs. Is a man considered to be a non-male if he loses his sexual organ? In Tien's narrative, confronting what 'makes' her female is a highly disconcerting process. In one aspect, this process of re-wombing taught in the class serves to underline social constructions of womanhood and femininity through a person's body. It reinforces normative ideas of womanhood instead of trying to resist, let alone dismantle them. The image of the Gaia, then, is just another construct instructing women who they should become.

The convergence of Justin's, Gibbo's and Tien's individual narratives follows a progressive trajectory that is linked through their struggles to resist and break free of social constructions based on the corporeality of their bodies, and their attempts to experiment with other identities. Instead of them being successful in the end, what marks their narratives is not so much their failure to completely abandon and dismantle these ideals that have held them back, but an acknowledgment that issues of their body are at the core of the problems that they have had with identity.

As we have seen, Teo's novel purposely displaces assumed notions of identity through the trope of the body. This is achieved by testing the body against several popular stereotypes, such as the myth of the Australian, white, heterosexual male, an ideal which has been institutionalised through *Gallipoli* and deeply imbedded within the national imagination,

and the idea of race and ethnicity. These stereotypes have plagued the lives of Tien, Justin and Gibbo through notions of Asianness, whiteness, and sexuality. The shadow of these systems ripples throughout the novel and affects intersecting discourses of identity. And still, despite their differences from hyper-normativity, the characters in *Behind the Moon* desire a sense of normality. However, we can also point out how, despite the rigidity of the social construction of bodies in the text, the processes in which these characters transform themselves into other bodies show the fluidity and permeability of their bodies. The act of changing the body itself is demonstrative of how the body is fluid and not confined to one mould but can instead be shaped by and for different performances.

What is clearly seen by the different performative structures within the text is that social construction of identities are reinforced by materiality of the body, and how our bodies are positioned at the core of everyday phenomena and experience. The experiences of the characters in the novel are determined by the imagined fixity and boundedness of corporeal bodies. *Behind the Moon* demonstrates the power structures that impose certain constructions of identity onto people. The next text to be analysed represents an idea of corporeal flexibility that the characters in *Behind the Moon*, given their circumstances, are not able to explore, but which completely deconstructs and dismantles traditional notions of the body. The theme of slippage in corporeal identity will be examined in relation to Tom Cho's collection of stories *Look Who's Morphing*, which cheekily carries this idea forward in a bolder and less subtle approach.

Liberation of the Body in Tom Cho's *Look Who's Morphing*

In explaining the goal of examining his Asian Australianness through his writing, Tom Cho states that this process involves:

> a route as unpredictable as my personal adventures with my identity. Over
> the last seven years, I have been writing a short fiction collection that

explores my identity. However, my identity has changed somewhat during this period, with one of the most significant of these changes being my gender transition. As a result, my collection has had to undergo many major changes too. Oh well — that's showbiz. In fact, given all of this, the title of my short story collection (if that itself doesn't change) seems quite apt: *Look Who's Morphing.* ("'No One Puts Baby in a Corner': Inserting My Self into the Text" 1)

This honesty about his identity demonstrates that the very nature of identity construction is always in flux, unstable, and every-changing. Cho's collection of short stories and anecdotes follows the journey (for lack of a more accurate term) of the narrator, Tom Cho, through a series of misadventures, as he morphs into different bodies and multiple identities. Cho's collection is a text that defies the norms of genre and is particularly hard to place within a specific category (Glastonbury 57). However, this difficulty of placing Cho's text into a specific genre reflects the crux of *Look Who's Morphing.* It showcases that identity, like the text, is seldom easily or neatly categorised under any simple rubric, making the case for scholars such as Olivia Guntarik who challenge the way that Asian Australian works are always marketed and promoted as 'ethnic' and/or 'migrant' (6).

The title *Look Who's Morphing* is a clever play on the film *Look Who's Talking* (1989), and shows the unregulated morphing of both body and identity in contexts that question our sense of reality. The collection's engagement with popular culture and humour is a powerful technique that serves to illustrate two important points about identity and its imaginative possibilities. Firstly, it serves as a means for Cho to attach himself into the text as a play on the relationship between narrator and writer and blur the lines between the two, although he stresses that his text is fiction rather than an autobiography. Secondly, it consistently undermines conventional stereotypes about Asians, and demonstrates that Asian experiences are not always encapsulated in terms of sorrow, anguish, struggle, survival, and displacement.

In a way, the experiences of the narrator give voice to the experiences of other groups of young Asian Australians in the country. At the same time, however, Cho makes it impossible to locate and differentiate any sort of boundary between story, character, and setting. Sebastian Abrahamson and Paul Simpson describe it best when they state:

> Where does one body end and another one begin? Is the limit of the body
>
> drawn at the skin, or does a body extend beyond its epidermis? If we both
>
> are and have a body then where does it/I end? (331).

Although we know that Cho's text is an explicit thesis on the slippery nature of identity construction, how does his collection of anecdotes and short stories relate to the body trope? In the previous section, I have looked at how Hsu-Ming Teo uses different spaces that surround the body within the dramaturgical schema as a setting for performativity of race, ethnicity, class, sex, and gender. In Cho's text, however, the trope of identity, place, and the body are approached in a different light. His text moves beyond orthodox notions of body and identity by fundamentally destabilizing any preconceived notion of selfhood. It examines the notion that identity is in fact illusionary and is only bought into existence by the performances in which people take part in their day-to-day life.

Although there exists scholarly work arguing against the stability of the body, the myth of stable and fixed identities continues to endure. As previously mentioned in this chapter, Cho utilises the trope of the body within the text to personify the disordered and shape-shifting nature of identity and its performances. Our bodies, which are often perceived as something given and unchangeable, are often identified through various markers, such as sex and race. However, in Cho's text the body is ambiguous, mouldable, and instantaneously reactive to internal and external stimuli. This is unlike the way bodies are treated in Teo's text, where the characters are bounded by their physical appearance. The way in which Cho uses personification suggests that the corporeality of our bodies is also geographical in nature. Triangulated with time and geographical spaces and imbued with symbolic meaning, the body

becomes a landscape where the self can continue to manifest and change. With this assumption, Cho's text raises several questions about the body as a geographical and a cultural space. In many of the anecdotes contained in his stories, we are confronted with multiple and nebulous bodily transformations. The body is represented as an unfixed entity that is not bound by any conventional markers such as ethnicity and sex. In addition to this, the make-up of the body is not limited to organic materiality of flesh and blood, but has the potential to transform into other types of material, including synthetic ones such as cybertronics and body suits. In this way, any conventionally limited perceptions of how a human body should look and what a body should be are challenged in the text, giving way to a more flexible understanding of our bodies and reflecting Butler's notion of embodied identity as a performance.

Many of the stories in the collection exemplify the unorthodox approach Cho has taken to challenge our understanding of the body's physiological structure and makeup. In "I, Robot," the Australian Government launches a new employment programme that would give people the opportunity to opt for another job by allowing themselves to be configured into robots. Yet, this new scheme is illusionary and serves only to hide the fact that nothing will change. Under the guise of this scheme, people will still continue to work and live the mundane lives that they have become accustomed to. The narrator's mother, who signs up for the programme, is given 'total linear computational speed of over six trillion operations per second' (Cho 99). With this capability, she and other people who register for the programme can quickly transform themselves into other objects and forms, such as cars. This ability is a direct reference to the *Transformers* film franchise in which alien beings transform themselves into different vehicles and objects during their stay on Earth. Finding appeal in the scheme after seeing its effects on his own mother, the narrator signs up for the program. After having to 'fill many forms to verify' (Cho 100) his identity, he is invited to select a suitable robot type. He then describes the drastic physical transformation:

> Over the next few months, the scientists transform me into a protocol
>
> robot. This transformation turns out to be quite a significant process. By the
>
> end, while I am humanoid in basic appearance, every aspect of my body has
>
> changed. I have golden plating for skin. I have a hyperalloy endoskeleton for
>
> bones. Where my eyes should be, there are spectral-analysers. As promised
>
> by the scientists, I am also equipped with a special communicator module
>
> and a new top-of-the-line positronic brain to give me highly advanced
>
> linguistic abilities. I now even speak with a prestigious-sounding British
>
> accent. (Cho 102)

Cho utilises the image of C-3PO, the familiar protocol droid from the iconic *Star Wars* films, to highlight a series of corporeal transformations that appear in the story that fuse the organic with the inorganic. "The Bodyguard", a fantastical retelling of the film of the same name, and "AIYO!!! An Evil Group of Ninjas is Entering and Destroying a Call Centre," similarly highlight how the idea of the Body is changed through the image of the cyborg. Cyberculture theorist Donna Haraway argues that the present preoccupation with the joining of machine to flesh marks the growth of cyborg culture in society and the possibilities of imagining a corporeal identity beyond the biological (Haraway 150-52). In Cho's text, the joining of synthetic materials to the biological body is undertaken through the character's own designs, reflecting Anthony Giddens' remark that 'we have become responsible for the designs of our own bodies' (102). Our ability to redesign our bodies through technological enhancement is not a novelty of cyborg culture, but can be seen in other ways that people choose to present themselves, such as through fashion and cosmetics.

Equally significant in showcasing the potential of the body to transform into other shapes and materials is the story entitled "Pinocchio". In this particular adventure, the popular children's television show *The Muppet Show* becomes another setting that showcases how the body is ever-changing and not limited to the flesh. The narrator, who wants to realise

his dream of being a guest on the show, receives an invitation to fulfil this wish. After sitting on the makeup chair and leaving the work to the Make-up and Wardrobe Department, he is literally transformed into a Muppet Penguin and realises that he 'did not wake up as the same person' (Cho 119). This sentence is significant because it signifies not just the narrator's physical transformation into a Muppet, but also a sudden shift in his identity. Over time, as he spends more time within the body of a muppet, he gradually begins to truly embody the character of the Muppet Penguin. Hence, the imagined synthesis between flesh, synthetic material, and technology triggers a fluidity of identity and a re-building not just of how we look but of who we 'are'.

In Cho's story, characters have the freedom to redesign or reconfigure their bodies according to their wishes and to suit a preferred aesthetic or persona. In following this theme to its imaginative ends, Cho's text engages with the political understanding that gender is a construction and can be reconfigured through deliberate acts of transformation. In "Suitmation", characters choose a specific suit, often modelled on their favourite celebrity, and wear these suits every day. Initially limited to a technique used in cinema and film to represent the idea of a character, the costumed suits in Cho's text become a daily part of life and, more than that, a means of 'becoming' the person they represent:

> As a result, the suitmation has changed our society. Most of the people I
> know own at least one suitmation suit. Furthermore, most of these people
> wear a suitmation suit every day … My brother Hank bought me my first
> suitmation suit when I was fifteen. I had always been a big Suzi Quatro fan
> so I ended up getting a Suzi Quatro suit. (Cho 12)

The narrator's suitmation, based on rock icon Suzi Quatro, allows him to transgress conventional notions of sex and gender, and become her. As an 'actor' in a suit, the narrator takes on a female performance and thus 'becomes' female. The way that this transformation is described in the text indicates that this type of change is a recurring phenomenon and, thus,

an accepted norm. Consequently, rigid gender binaries and fixed identity constructions are destabilised. The act of putting on the suit requires agency and the willingness to take on certain aspects that come with becoming Suzi Quatro, through the act of appropriating her behaviour and personality. Butler argues that one's behaviour shapes one's gender. For the time that the narrator is suited up as Suzi Quatro, the gender mannerisms that he adopts transform his gender. This is similar to Butler's discussion on drag queens and how they alternate between gender performances. However, transformation or reconfiguration, whether of gender, age, or other aspects, is not achieved only through the use of a suit. As described in the text, transformation from one state of being to another can also be triggered by different emotions.

Emotion can also affect how the body changes in the text, as exemplified in the story "Today on Dr. Phil". Cho uses the popular talk show, which is hosted by Phil McGraw, to demonstrate the sudden transformation of the body elicited by extreme changes in emotion. On the show, Cho reveals to Dr. Phil his fantasy of transforming into an aggressive creature resembling Marvel's The Incredible Hulk:

> and so I confess to Dr Phil a fantasy that I have recently had. In this
>
> fantasy, I become extremely angry. The fantasy begins with me starting to
>
> sweat from my anger. My heart starts beating faster. I clench my fists and
>
> the anger makes my face heat up. In this fantasy, I am like The Incredible
>
> Hulk in that the angrier I get, the stronger I get. So my muscles start to
>
> grow. My muscles become so big that they start to outgrow my clothes.
>
> The seams of my shirt and pants begin to split My neck becomes thicker,
>
> and my thighs and calves swell and become harder. I am growing and
>
> growing, putting on height as well as bulk, and soon I am around eight feet
>
> tall and full of strength and fury. (Cho 61)

The angrier he becomes, the faster he transforms into the Hulk. His skin quickly takes on a deep green colour and he develops a bigger and stronger body. The wrath and aggression he feels become transformative factors for his body. This link between emotion and the body is also exemplified through Tara's regressive aging. Tara, a girl that the narrator likes, ages backwards the more she experiences arousal. Emotions seem to be a transformative factor for the body. This illustrates the idea that identities precede bodies and not the other way round.

Cho's use of the body to exemplify its permeability and the slipperiness of identity is no doubt a political one designed to question the limitations of orthodox notions of 'selfhood'. Although performance is a primary part of the performative processes in the texts, it differs from the theatrical sense because the stability of self or subjectivity is always called into question. The various changing identities (that is, the act of becoming Mary Poppins, a Muppet, C-3PO or the Hulk), and the continuous shifting and manipulation of the space-time continuum help to assert the instability of our performing bodies. The transformations of the narrator and of the other characters in the text are set against an ever-changing scene, as if to dismantle any unity of time, place and matter. This strategy is effective, as it follows and enhances the rapid transformation of the characters. Cho's unorthodox approach to the body serves to highlight how the body is often overlooked as a cultural space and how the notion of 'place' itself is subjective and ambiguous.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered an examination of the relationship between the body and cultural space in narratives of identity in two Asian Australian texts. The readings of the two texts highlight the often overlooked cultural space of the body, which is, as Adrienne Rich declares, our most immediate geography. The triangulation between body, place and identity has opened new avenues to discuss the nature of contemporary identities. Although

discussions on the body are not something novel, post-structuralist and feminist reconfigurations of the body in the past few decades have allowed our understanding of the body to move beyond rigid binaries. Particularly within feminist theory, the body has often been used to dismantle notions of the Other and of difference and it has been applied to question normative constructions of gender and the self.

Although ultimately their approach to the body is vastly different from each other, Teo and Cho have highlighted how bodies can be used as provocative sites to question and contest ideas of selfhood. Teo juxtaposes the individual with physical inscriptions of the body and with the implications of these inscriptions for the socio-cultural and political contexts of the three main protagonists in *Behind the Moon*. Justin cannot remedy his Asianness, which is inscribed in his physical appearance, with his sexual orientation. And when he does have the courage to explore that aspect of himself, he faces discrimination and prejudice from his family and the LGBT community. Both Gibbo and Tien experience a sense of having to perform a certain persona —Gibbo is shamed by his fat and decides to take on an Asian mask to find a sense of belonging, and Tien suffers insecurities about her Asian-African features and attempts to be more feminine. The notions of embodiment and performativity encapsulate the core of how bodies are represented in Teo's text, in which she highlights how the characters in her text are all bounded by social constructions of the body and self. They try to fight the rigidity and discomfort of having stereotypical identities imposed on them and not having the freedom to explore others.

Cho's rejection of established logic and unity in *Look Who's Morphing* allows for greater freedom of the body, exemplifying different types of performativity. The performing bodies in the text go beyond actors taking on roles and donning masks. Performativity in the text illustrates a kind of resistance towards social ideals and the need to conform to them. Although characters in *Behind the Moon* perform certain identities, their performances are

always geared to fit a specific role or image. Cho's text, on the other hand, radicalises notions of the body to go beyond perceptions that symbolically and physiologically bind the body.

The different ways in which corporeal identity is represented in these two texts reflect the concept of body geopolitics: that the body is itself a geographical site and a cultural space. *Behind the Moon* explicitly highlights the different intersections of identity and how these inscriptions on the body hinder and problematise how the characters perceive and construct their identities. How the characters choose to reinvent themselves highlights this point. *Look Who's Morphing* explores the same theme, but in a bolder manner, where the driving force of its thesis is just as bold and eccentric as the physical transformations that take place in the text. In all, the politics of the body and identity in these two texts points to the protagonists' efforts to reclaim space for themselves within an entanglement of cultures and subcultures. While the focus of this chapter has been on the body as a cultural space and the relationship between identity and the body as the geography closest in, the following chapter will explore the politics of identity within different domestic spaces.

Chapter Two

Representations of Domestic Spaces in Alice Pung's *Unpolished Gem* (2006) and *Her Father's Daughter* (2011)

Introduction

This chapter analyses two fictional memoirs written by Alice Pung, both of which address the confluence of memory, place, and identity. Through intersections of memory and home, Pung's examination of identity follows a trajectory from the first formation of identity in childhood to a more transcultural and hybridised form of identification as an adult. Domestic spaces in the two memoirs are key and they function as transitory spaces, with each framing a point of evolution for the protagonist's process of 'becoming'. *Unpolished Gem* (2006) and *Her Father's Daughter* (2011) chart, in a non-linear fashion, the protagonist's search for identity between two culturally diverse worlds by marrying her experiences growing up in Australia with her family's efforts to assimilate into Australian society. *Unpolished Gem* focuses on Agheare's (or Alice's) childhood through the stories of her mother and paternal grandmother. *Her Father's Daughter*, on the other hand, is a darker and more sombre narrative that recounts her father's damaging experiences at the hands of the Khmer Rouge before the family's escape to Australia, and focuses on Agheare's life experiences as an adult.

Pung's texts interlace the power of memory, the socio-physical dimensions of home, and the continuing process of identity construction. Within the broad context of contemporary Asian Australian literature, Pung's writing draws attention to the experiences of twentieth century migrants. Her memoirs approaching the experience of migration are an extension of previous Asian Australian fiction that addresses the challenges that migrants, particularly refugees, face upon arrival in Australia, trying to assimilate into the culture.

Born in Footscray, Victoria within a year of her family's arrival in Australia, and trained as a lawyer, Pung is primarily a writer and educator. Her first book, *Unpolished Gem*, received critical acclaim when published in 2006, winning the prestigious Australian Newcomer of the Year award the following year. Identity is a recurring theme in Pung's writing and having grown up Asian in Australia, Pung's experiences translate into her texts. Growing up as a second-generation Cambodian Australian has definitely influenced her creative writing process, as intergenerational issues rise to the surface. The differences in experiences and outlook between first and second generation Asian Australians needs to be taken into consideration.

Conceptualising 'Home'

Home is multifaceted notion. Not only does it conflate the physical and non-material, but it is also a space that is altogether personal and social. It is a site and space that is pivotal to human activity. Home can mean many things to many people. To migrants, particularly refugees, it is a significant notion. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the search for space is tied to the search for identity, and spaces such as the domestic home are central to this pursuit. Domestic space is the locus of cultural, emotional and physical experiences, and its impact on human experiences cements its centrality in many cultures. Almost everyone has had experience with the concept of 'house' (Smyth and Croft 12). Complex human practices transform a shelter or a house into a dwelling. Smyth and Croft comment that a dwelling reflects the identity of its owner or the dweller, as well as the culture within which it is built (12).

The idea of dwelling is an important one. Gaston Bachelard, in his book *The Poetics of Space* (1958, trans. 1969), argues that our soul is within a dwelling state (xxxvii). The house, then, becomes a suitable place to examine experience. Although Bachelard's argument focuses on the inner psychological space rather than the physical site of the house, his argument is important because it brings to the forefront ideas of how home space is

experienced. Narratives centred in home environments are a rich source of memories of home life. Antoinette Burton, in her book *Dwelling in the Archive* (2003), raises thought-provoking questions about how the notion of home is of political importance, particularly for women writers, because it is a space that lies within the intersection of history and memory (5). Life stories go beyond the premise of the plot to include the physical walls, objects within the home and interactions that took place within and amongst them. 'Contemporary as well as historical life writings,' observe Blunt and Dowling, 'have been particularly important in exploring geographies of home in relation to gender, 'race', class and sexuality' (34). This is because such life writings highlight the continuum between temporality and spatiality and emphasise material, metaphorical, and political aspects of home, which are a key concern in life writings, especially those by women, because of the association between domesticity and womanhood.

The act of recollection or remembering, and its association with place, as Hoelscher and Derek claim, is both material and performative (350) and is usually articulated as performances such as rituals and festivals. Rooted in sites and places, these celebrations and practices highlight issues vital to specific communities and their struggles (350). However, scholars such as Hoeslcher and Derek argue that everyday acts of living are no less performative and communal than these seemingly bigger performances or practices. Performative acts of everyday life are smaller in scale but their performance value is significant in highlighting the plight of various communities and groups, because these everyday acts and gestures provide raw resources for understanding their connection to broader issues.

Within the context of Asian Australian literature, performative acts such as having a family dinner at the table can show a number of things about the identity work within the text. This sense of performative belonging, often associated with collective identity processes, will be assessed in this chapter to highlight identity and difference from both

individualised and collective perspectives, mainly through personal experiences, but also through allusions to institutionalised practices. Anne-Marie Fortier, in her study of space and belonging in the context of Italian migrants, comments:

> The relationship between identity and difference as it operates here is at
> times one of synonymy: constructing cultural identity is also constructing
> about cultural difference. At other times, the relationship relates to the
> tension that arises when difference is at once constitutive of, and a
> potentially contesting force of, identity. (3)

Similarly, constructions of Asian Australian identities are motivated by the difference that emerges from the perceived contrast between Asian and Australian cultures. Yet, at the same time, many Australians of Asian descent are also forced to consider how this difference has helped shape and is still shaping their construction of identities.

Like much of contemporary Asian Australian literature, Pung's memoirs are concerned with the negotiation that takes place between cultural ancestry and the implications of being Australian. Pung's memoirs are built upon the nexus of first- and second-hand recollection. These recollections highlight issues of identity and assimilation that characterise not only Asian Australian writing, but writing produced by those at the fringes of society.

In an interview conducted by the *Australian Humanities Review*, Simone Lazaroo identifies that it is not necessary for Asian Australian writers to write about identity, but 'that the story of individuals' struggles for identity as they negotiate different cultures is arguably one of the stories of our times' (114). When asked whether the autobiographical impulse is a curse to Asian Australian writers, Lazaroo states:

> Writing about autobiographical issues is a reasonably common and
> sometimes publishable starting point for many fiction writers, regardless of

their cultural origins. Obviously this is at least partly because
autobiographical experience provides one of the most accessible sources of
the kinds of details we need to write creatively. Is this autobiographical
impulse a curse? Yes and no. (115)

Yet, despite these issues surrounding autobiographies, we cannot deny that Australian literature is now marked by a sense of ambivalence towards issues of identity (Ommundsen 503; O. Khoo 463), as shown through varying approaches, including narratives that now go beyond traditional notions of identity. Furthermore, although identity is now engaged through different rubrics such as transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and hybridity, the national context is equally as important.

I argue that the two texts under discussion in this chapter highlight notions of encapsulated cultural hybridity that entails the experiences of people with hyphenated identities. Memories and childhood experiences in the two texts will serve as reference points to this idea. Becky Thompson and Sangeeta Tyagi explain that 'writing about racial identity required revisiting our homes of origin — our families, neighborhood, and childhood communities.' (qtd. in Blunt and Dowling 34). Blunt and Dowling go on to explain that within deep reflection of personal childhood memories, people explore two things: firstly, the reach and multiplicity of home and identity politics beyond conventional roots; and secondly, how these roots and origins are themselves unsettled and unfixed (34).

I also suggest that identity processes in the texts are constantly changing as the narrator grows from a child into an adult and develops a more individualised awareness for a personal form of identity. This development is highlighted in the evolution of the idea of home, which follows a clear trajectory between the various domestic spaces in the two texts. The transition from child to adult is strongly emphasised in *Her Father's Daughter*, as the narrator ventures into unfamiliar territory and goes into the world outside her doorstep.

Newer and more complex forces of the world come into play and shape how the narrator views not only herself, but the other people around her.

Because the texts are lightly fictionalised memoirs, I believe that it is essential to take into account the writer's subjective position as a member of the Asian Australian community. For a predominantly non-Asian readership the use of memory, second-hand experience, and an emphasis on the idea of home in the texts is a means of highlighting not only the multifaceted and diverse Asian experience, but also the struggles of two different generations of Asian Australians. In Pung's case, as a second-generation Australian of Chinese Cambodian descent, there is a sense of an intergenerational identity gap between parent and child. Her parents, having been raised in Indo-China, view Australia with a different lens from that of their children. I believe that intergenerational difference is an important point to examine in the analyses of the two texts.

Unpolished Gem

Unpolished Gem relates a childhood coloured by the experiences of the women in the family. It also provides readers with a perspective on how second-generation migrant children perceive and experience social and cultural zones differently from their parents. Having been positioned within two contact zones, in this case an Asian cultural heritage (within domestic spaces) and an Australian environment (the outside world), the text reveals how precarious identity constructions are for children who grow up within hybrid spaces.

Autobiographical narratives make clear the relationship between memories of the past and the current self. Psychologists working in the field of autobiographical memory, such as Robyn Fivush, Kate McLean, Monisha Pasupathi, Jennifer Pals, suggest that the creation of narratives of the past simultaneously and necessarily construct narratives of the self. Similarly, Egyptian novelist Sherif Hetata, in his essay 'The Self and Autobiography' (2003), sums up the relationship between autobiography and the self:

autobiography is written not to provide a chronology of events related to
the authors' lives, … but rather to narrate the story of a self, of its
trajectory through life, of the experiences that made the writers the human
beings they are. Autobiography should tell the reader how the author
became a self; it should tell of experiences, choices in life; it should reveal
the things we suppress or fear or hide or show under false colors; it should
present the truth of the individual self, how the self relates to the world, to
society, to family, to a spouse or a lover, to friends and rivals, to the system
and values that govern life. … Autobiography is a carrier of creativity, of
an individual experience of life. … Autobiography possesses something
specific that differentiates it from other writings. Its subject is the
individual self. (124)

Agheare is a character comparable to a Bildungsroman heroine, who goes on a
journey of self-discovery and tackles various growing pains in order to achieve this self-
realisation. Agheare's journey, however, can be acknowledged as atypical of adolescence. In
her case, growing pains involve not only discovering parts of herself, but also carving a
cultural space. *Unpolished Gem*, in particular, emphasises the family home as a leitmotif for
identity, as represented in the different houses that Agheare inhabits and visits throughout
the book. Here, the houses are placed within a trajectory that highlights the different stages
of identity construction, following her childhood and her maturity into a young adolescent.
Different houses and home environments reconstructed and re-imagined in *Unpolished Gem*
are important aspects of autobiographical memory and Agheare as a subject. Houses and
home environments that appear in narrative forms, such as storytelling, function as physical
sites of remembering.

Houses are important because they are like 'second bodies'; they remember through
the reanimation of the memories of their inhabitants, whether in the past or in the present

(T. Davidson 340). Houses can also 'remember' because they are imbued with the responsibilities of representing in material form the virtualities of childhood. Agheare's developing understanding of her identity is crystallised and made apparent in her changing perceptions of the family home as only one part of her world, as she gradually realises the complexity of being both Asian and Australian by engaging with the world outside the family home. The houses Agheare inhabits represent the stages of her development: the houses enable the reconstruction of childhood experiences and memories of family life, and they demonstrate how these recollections are related to an ongoing identity project within the texts.

Kathryn Burns, in her analysis of childhood landscapes in the imaginary, maintains that reconstructions of childhood are often imagined as Edenic realms that shatter at the onslaught of maturity (Burns 89). *Unpolished Gem*, however, does not reconstruct childhood within the family home as a re-imagined or resituated Eden. In the memoir's constructed world, the family home is a place where comfort and nurture conflict with socio-cultural expectations, and decorum is observed and exchanged. The security and comfort provided by the home exist with the burden of expectations for Agheare to succeed in becoming a fully-fledged Australian.

This tension is initiated and constructed by memory, whether it is a personally experienced event or a re-imagining or reconstruction of someone else's. This stress is articulated in the observations of day-to-day life experiences in the houses described in the memoir. The first house, a rented weatherboard in Footscray, provides a view of the initial arrival in Australia of Agheare's parents and paternal grandmother and their reaction to the differences they have discovered in the country. Their second house, situated in Braybrook, follows Agheare's early childhood and the beginnings of her understanding of the concept of difference. This house is highlighted as a site of nurture and conflict. The third house,

also situated in Braybrook, highlights events that take place during Agheare's adolescence as she becomes increasingly aware of being different.

The boat motif, which is often used in 'ethnic' literature to foreshadow trauma and consequences surrounding displacement, is inverted in order to focus on other experiences. In the first line of the memoir, Pung states; 'This story does not begin on a boat. We begin our story in a suburb of Melbourne, Australia, in a market swarming with fat pigs and thin people' (*Unpolished Gem* 1). This suburb, Footscray, has a large South East Asian community and a market full of 'brown faces' (*Unpolished Gem* 20). Agheare comments that 'this is the suburb where words like *and*, *at* and *of* are redundant, where full sentences are not necessary' (*Unpolished Gem* 2). This suburb, therefore, is made up of many 'others', whose differences of ethnicity, class and gender are clearly marked within the market environment. Marked difference, however, can be seen as undesirable for those wishing to assimilate within the host culture which is perceived to be overwhelmingly White, middle-class and masculine. The exterior of the second family home seems to articulate an effort to assimilate by exhibiting external sameness. Concurrently, this external sameness is contrasted by internal difference, where cultural continuity exists. Agheare describes this contrast in minute detail through her recollection of the home:

> In the evenings, the windows are open and we go outside and sit in the
>
> trailer Dad brought home from the Alcan factory. It is good in the trailer,
>
> we make it bang here and there in the wilderness of our front yard,
>
> beneath the tall red-purple plum tree. This tree overshadows all the other
>
> trees, stretching its branches like extended arms covering the whole front
>
> yard and half the verandah, and in between the smaller trees, the bushes,
>
> the ferns clamouring for the light. Red leaves cover the ground of the front
>
> yard, and the whole place is like a rainforest without rain. You cannot tell
>
> that this is a Chinese house. No hexagonal I Ching mirror on the front

door, no words of warning, no clipped hedge and double happiness signs

anywhere, unless you count the name of our street. No neat cumquat trees

at the front for luck. (*Unpolished Gem* 19–20)

The way the exterior is described draws a distinction between the world outside and a foreshadowed difference lurking within. The front yard and the garden, and the absence of Chinese cultural iconographies, suggest that the family intends to blend into the surrounding suburban, middle-class aesthetic and expectations. Agheare's observation of this duality infers a sort of distinction being made between 'us' and being 'so true-blue suburban' (*Unpolished Gem* 20). This distinction educes notions of the 'Other': marked differences can only be seen within the confines of the home as any sign of difference is rendered invisible on the outside.

The interior, however, highlights not only the family's practices to ensure cultural continuity but also remnants of the family history in Cambodia. Agheare comments that 'you would never suspect that the inside of the house is crowded with such a collection of curiosities that make us smile' (*Unpolished Gem* 20). Their experiences of civil war in Cambodia have taught the Pungs to secure valuables and keep them safe from prying eyes; the house is filled with kitsch items. The experience of loss and trauma is articulated through the interior décor. The juxtaposition between the exterior and the interior points to the need to assimilate but at the same time, maintain their cultural identity.

Moving away from Cambodia and the past, Australia for the Pungs is all about renewal and a fresh start. On a smaller level, their house also is an embodiment of the Pungs' excitement and eagerness to begin anew in a place they regard as a sort of 'Wonderland'. Agheare herself symbolises this change of fortunes, and is the physical embodiment of the dreams, aspirations, and expectations of her parents and grandmother. This play on her name and the image of Australia as a sort of Wonderland is not something unique to the Pung family. Agheare comments that Asian children born to migrant parents typically have

names that exemplify their parent's views and aspirations. As Agheare explains, 'All this doesn't matter because at the moment they are the ones with the banal unpronounceable names, and we are the children with the special names. We are the ones smiled upon by grown-ups, white people and Fortune' (*Unpolished Gem* 15).

However, the line between 'us' and 'them' continues to be redrawn, much like the distinction between the interiors and exteriors of the homes. This distinction, however, becomes more complex as the memoir unfolds: more complex, precarious, and multifarious.

This complexity highlights Agheare's growth into adolescence, which is often a complex and painful experience (Blunt and Dowling 218). Nevertheless, Agheare's narrative in *Unpolished Gem* seems to lack what Diane Wolf calls 'emotional transnationalism', where children of migrants must negotiate between different notions of belonging that arise from history and the memories shared by the older generation. This circumstance 'creates tensions, confusion, and contradictory messages' (285) and, as Wolf suggests, it can lead to a sense of alienation and despair in some migrant children.

The entanglement of ethnicity, culture, and heritage, explored in *Unpolished Gem*, is not new in contemporary writing and criticism. Here, these issues are spatially reconfigured and continue to be a focus, as they highlight a form of migrancy that is inherited from one generation to the next. Inherited migrancy within the psyche of some children of migrants, particularly those of the second generation, goes further than the constructs of intellect and geography. This mindset continues to be passed down from parent or elder to child, and from one generation to the next. The stress and pressure of trying to fit in, coupled with conflicting world views, regulate and structure identities in the children of migrants.

This notion of transplanted migrancy can be seen through various activities that take place within the home. Agheare's bed-sharing with her grandmother is exemplary of this process. Richard Rodriguez notes that the rooms of migrant children are physical and

metaphorical structures that maintain, nurture and remind children of their parents' aspirations and expectations (11). The lack of her own room and her bed-sharing with her grandmother can be seen as an extension or alternative of Rodriguez's argument. Before bed, the grandmother would tell Agheare stories of the family's past, which help instill recognition and appreciation of her cultural heritage, and of a collective past:

> "In the past, in the Golden Towers," my grandmother began, and I knew
>
> she was going to tell me about the other country where everybody lived a
>
> life before me. All her stories began with things in the past, in Long
>
> Mountain, China, or Cambodia, the Golden Towers. (*Unpolished Gem* 53)

Telling stories of the past is one way to ensure a sort of cultural continuity in migrant children as a part of a collective past and memory. The stories of Cambodia and China are foreign to Agheare as they are 'about the country where everybody lived a life before me' (*Unpolished Gem* 53). Agheare seems to acknowledge that these memories of China and Cambodia are only second-hand memories, but these memories, particularly of China, hold great significance for her grandmother. This need for continuity is also paired with the need for change. The commitment to make this new life in Australia successful is something that is emphasised in the text. The aid given to refugees by the Australian Government has allowed the displaced families to begin a new life in the country. Agheare's grandmother, who is appreciative of the help, calls the Australian Government 'Father Government' (*Unpolished Gem* 25). The contrast between the Fatherland and the Motherland is illustrated within the past and the present. The Fatherland symbolises a rebirth of fortunes for the family. The Motherland, on the other hand, symbolises suffering and devastation. Acquisition of English plays a major role in conveying appreciation to the Fatherland.

Here, language is a powerful tool. Proficiency in the language of the host country is an important part not only of assimilation, but also in getting close to the 'centre' and being less markedly different. Learning English will also allow migrants and their children to

participate in the host society. Agheare's fear of being different is highlighted through her inability to properly articulate the language in school. This fear about language also highlights the anxiety children of migrants feel about being different. Not only is Agheare marked out by wearing a Mao suit to kindergarten, but her anxiety over English is also paralysing:

> 'Why didn't you tell your teacher that you need to go to the toilet?'
>
> I shrugged and shifted uncomfortably. Foreign words did not seem to slip out of me as easily as the contents of my bladder.
>
> …
>
> Before I drifted off to sleep, I wondered doubtfully whether my 'escoose mi plis I nid to go to da toylit' outburst would persuade the other kids to share their Play-Doh with me … It was not the end of the Mao suit either. In Grade Two, when we studied Australian History, the teachers decided to have a colonial dress-up parade … The Mao suit came out.
>
> 'Why are you wearing your pyjamas, Alice?' toffee-scented, doe-eyed, dimpled-faced Kylie asked me. Loud enough for the other girls lining up in swirly floor-length dresses to hear … Yet, I knew I had to ask, and there was no getting out of it … 'Please, Miss Higgins, I need to go to the toilet.' (*Unpolished Gem* 51, 53-4)

Agheare's anxiety over the pronunciation of her English seems to affect her confidence in school and her ability to mix with her schoolmates. Her accented English also positions her on the periphery.

The house is also a gendered space. In the second and third houses, Pung highlights two different kinds of experiences within the family household and two different dynamics

that entail these experiences. In an interview published on her website, Pung explains that *Unpolished Gem* is derived from a Chinese Cambodian saying that "A girl is like cotton wool—once she's dirtied, she can never be clean again. A boy is like a gem—the more you polish it, the brighter it shines" (*Alicepung.com*). This phrase catches the essence of what the memoir is about, as girls and women would clearly understand the challenges of being female in this context and the roles expected of them. The women in Agheare's life are far from being cotton wool. Rather, they themselves symbolise unpolished gems that exhibit their strength. Both Agheare's mother and paternal grandmother are strong-willed and opinionated, and they often clash as a result.

Studies on gendered perceptions of home are not new and women are often the focus of the literature on home (Mallett 75). Moira Munro and Ruth Madigan comment that being responsible for domestic order, which is traditionally the responsibility of women, means that women are not able to experience home as a haven for relaxation (114). Yet, Pung's narration of home is not all about home as a site of oppression for her mother. It is also about a multifaceted struggle by migrant women to assimilate. At home, Kien finds it increasingly difficult to cope with the pressures of housework. Coupled with her inability to speak English, her participation in Australian society becomes limited. Even as her husband and children seem to be easing into the process, Kien struggles to assimilate. In a reimagining of her mother's experience, Agheare comments:

> After my grandmother leaves, she thinks up the letter she really wants to
> write. At first it comes out as a blur of black cloud, but then words emerge
> from the smog. 'Dear Ma, this family treats me like a servant, like that
> servant Red Bean that they brought back from China to work around the
> house and factory in Cambodia ... 'Ma, why did you let me go?' she wants
> to write. My mother feels her own heart is a little red bullet, poking around
> in her chest, searching for a way out. (*Unpolished Gem* 27)

Unlike the oppressive patriarchal practices examined in most literature about women and homes, Kien's experience indicates a loss of control and autonomy over her own life. This is not only because of her responsibilities but also because of her relationship with her mother-in-law. Before Pol Pot's rule in Cambodia, Kien was the daughter of one of the employees in the factory of her husband's family. Despite marrying into the family, the master–servant dynamic is still present.

Shelly Mallett comments that although women manage the household and its consumption, they have no control over its economy. In most cases, financial control is a man's game and is handled by the master of the house (Mallett 75). In the Pung household, however, financial control is in the hands of the mother-in-law: 'My grandmother sits down and starts counting her Father Government money. Her Father Government money includes the money my father earns because he gives everything to her' (*Unpolished Gem* 29).

Without any sense of autonomy, Kien struggles to find a space that is independent of the household. Pauline Hunt notes that women, in particular, struggle to find their own space and to reconcile self-identity and individual expression (Hunt 102). Although the home is regarded as a feminine realm created by women, as creators they often do not have any power over the space that they have created (Munro and Madigan 114). Over the years, Agheare observes that her mother puts more and more effort into her work, especially her work in making gold jewellery.

This sense of 'busy-ness' in turn creates a sort of imagined space for housebound women (Munro and Madigan 115-16). This imagined space created by using their busy lives helps to create a niche and purpose for women like Kien. Without this space, Kien loses her sense of self. Working hard all her life and avoiding becoming a 'lady', Kien has reached a point where industry has become ingrained and becomes a part of her sense of self. Agheare comments, 'My mother was certainly not a lady, she worked and worked and

worked, and when she wasn't working she was cleaning, and when she wasn't cleaning or working she was sick' (*Unpolished Gem* 94).

Bronwen Walter (2001), in her study of the women in Irish diasporic communities, comments that 'diasporic women are … placed in a paradoxical relationship to home. It can be a source of containment and fixity, rendering women invisible, and linking them to the mundane and routine' (197). Yet, Walter acknowledges that this relationship with the home can also become the beginning for challenging dominant cultures. Later in her story, we see how Agheare, after witnessing the lives of her mother, grandmother, and the women of her cultural heritage, experiences fear about the predictability of such a life and this fear becomes the driving force for her desire to escape from it.

The antagonism between the two older women is not confined to housework. They also are at odds over Agheare as well, since Kien believes she is losing her daughter to her mother-in-law. Agheare is stuck between the two strong female figures in her family as these two women shape her past, present, and future. Kien mulls over what kind of nature Agheare will develop 'if the girl is always being whisked away from her? … She wants this little daughter to be completely her own, but the girl is already doomed' (*Unpolished Gem* 30). Kien then makes a decision to let her daughter go, because she deems it preferable for her daughter to be included in the side of the Served than share her predicament. Agheare, knowing the relationship between the two women, quickly becomes an informer for both camps and has no sense of loyalty, giving information to the highest bidder. The role of the double informer that Agheare plays in the conflict between her mother and her grandmother is symptomatic of her struggle to find herself and develop her own sense of identity. Her engagement with two different cultures and in this case, with two different parties, necessitates her always interpreting where she stands. This interpretation is suggestive of Stuart Hall's theory of identity as an ongoing process as opposed to something established and definite. These women are part of her only reference to a culture and

country she has never known, whereas the only culture she has experienced first-hand is the Australian culture she grew up with. Her continuous negotiation and interpretation within different belongings enables Agheare to discover alternative spaces in which to find and articulate herself.

The intricacies of negotiating between cultures can also be seen through the dynamics between mother and daughter. Language seems to play an important part in the relationship between Agheare and Kien. Learning English is a gateway to learning about Australia, but being homebound, Kien is unable to pick up the language. Kien is effectively disenfranchised not only from Ausralian society, but also from her family. Concurrently, while Kien struggles to learn English, Agheare experiences the loss of the mother tongue as she begins to lose her ability to express herself in Teochew. Both mother and daughter struggle to express themselves because the issue of language deepens their already difficult relationship. Kien laments, "'Well, I have worse. Mine *can't* speak to me anymore! ... she raised one eyebrow towards me. "See that one there? She can't string a proper sentence together!'" (*Unpolished Gem* 148). Even though Kien is able to become an efficient outworker without learning English, her relationship with her children, especially Agheare, is affected. We witness Kien's frustrations in the third house:

> She was loud because she could not read because she had been
>
> housebound for two decades. And now, over the dinner table, she would
>
> watch as my father and his children littered their language with English
>
> terms, until every second word was in the foreign tongue. We hardly
>
> noticed the food she had prepared for us, so engrossed were we in our
>
> babble. She sat there staring, at us, trying to make sense of these aliens at
>
> her table. (*Unpolished Gem* 143)

Through the issue of language, Pung destabilises the clichéd perception of migrants and their refusal to assimilate. Although friends tell Agheare "'Migrants don't assimilate," ...

"they all come here and stick together, and don't bother to learn the language'" (*Unpolished Gem* 143), she knows from experience that this is false, or at least, not deliberately done.

Ien Ang, who is herself of Peranakan descent, uses her own stories of Chineseness to show how difficult it is to articulate a distinct identity as 'an (Overseas) Chinese' ("On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West" 24). Ang, whose mother avoided passing knowledge of the Chinese language to her, comments that her mother's decision had cut her off from an invaluable cultural source and that she learned to articulate herself in Bahasa Indonesia (28). Agheare's loss of the Teochew language highlights Ang's argument on the indeterminacy of Chineseness to signify identity. It is seen as something not very 'Chinese' and distressing to Agheare's mother, who suggests that she is drifting away from her culture. Eventually, Kien fears that Agheare will marry a white Australian and forget her Chinese heritage. Agheare's cultural capital, which is derived from her very close relationship with her grandmother, reaffirms her sense of self and provides her with mental and emotional security. Through her grandmother's stories, Agheare glimpses family history in China and in Cambodia. After the separation from and eventual death of her grandmother, Agheare loses her cultural capital, partially losing the affirmation for her existence and forcing her to reorientate herself.

Unlike the boundedness of her sense of Chineseness and her Australian cultural sensitivities represented in the second house, the third house, which marks Agheare's growth into adolescence, presents readers with growing identity issues. In a way, the family's transition into the third house signifies a further transition into the 'Great Australian Dream' (*Unpolished Gem* 127), as Agheare puts it. Symbolising what Alice Healy (2010) calls a superficial representation of migrant success (9), the new house is built differently from the previous house. Agheare's father is finally able to build his dream house, in which, she notes, 'things needed to be different, things were whitewashed' (*Unpolished Gem* 130). The house, which Agheare's friends describe as 'such a big house for such little people' (*Unpolished Gem*

127), represents how far the family has come since fleeing Cambodia. In his study of transnational homes, David Ley (1995) finds that the migrant home is 'an important opportunity to demonstrate one's appropriation of progress, one's purchase upon modernity' (192). Old clothes are exchanged for new ones as the family sheds the image and persona of newly arrived refugees. Agheare narrates:

> we could look at the recently arrived ones, noting their grey tights with
>
> yellow dresses and Velcro shoes, and we could roll our eyes and think that
>
> although they didn't know any better now, they would learn, oh they
>
> would learn to adapt or be laughed at. ... And we felt pity and resentment
>
> and plenty of embarrassment for their eagerness and their countryside
>
> errors. But most of all, unacknowledged envy of their pure, rooted-to-the-
>
> moment, everyday-is-a-wonderland existence, because it reminded us of a
>
> distant self we once were, we of the wide-eyed, shut-mouth stupor, we of
>
> the wide-mouth, shut-eyed delirium, when things were louder and funnier
>
> and lettuce was greener and gleaming concrete seemed newer. (*Unpolished*
>
> *Gem* 129)

In this third house Agheare's experiences run parallel with issues that plague many adolescents. The loss of her grandmother, the pressures in school and her responsibilities as the eldest child at home, accumulate to affect Agheare in a way that is very different from experiences of her childhood.

But hoping to begin a new phase of life in a new home is not an easy process for everyone. Kien, whose loss of employment dissipates the space she has created for herself, is having difficulty adjusting to her new circumstance. The house binds her existence: 'she could not stand to be in the house, in the house she could not stand still' (*Unpolished Gem* 156). The disappearance of the space she has constructed and maintained for herself throws everything off kilter as Agheare realises that women like her mother do not know 'how to

live this life of luxury and loneliness. Used to working for others all their lives, they did not know how to be idle without guilt. And they could not stop working' (*Unpolished Gem* 147). This seems to suggest that Kien's experiences are symptomatic of depression. Perceptions of depression and mental illness, however, are culturally contingent. Kien does not comprehend the idea of depression and she attributes her condition to her circumstances. 'Depression, the doctor called it, but my mother did not know what it meant.' (*Unpolished Gem* 156) This perception of depression is symptomatic, as concluded by Furnham and Malik (1994) in a study analysing the cultural differences surrounding depressive and anti-depressive behaviour in native Britons and Asian–Britons. Furnham and Malik argue that middle-aged Asian women in Britain have a different perception of depression:

> The difference in the Asian middle-aged women's view of depression can be understood in terms of their cultural values and beliefs. For example the middle-aged Asian view of the item: *It is usually helpful to tell a depressed woman to "pull herself together"* can be understood in terms of the emphasis that Asian culture places on the family. According to traditional Asian values the family unit takes precedence over the individual, and consequently a condition such as a depression is often construed as being selfish and self-indulgent, as it is concentrating on the individual's feelings and not taking into account the other family members' feelings or needs ... Asian middle-aged women tended to think: *Having a job outside the home helps keep women from getting depressed. Yet, only 50% of them were in employment in comparison to 81 % of the British middle-aged women.* [Italicised in original] (117-8)

In a study of mental illness in older Asian immigrants in the United States, Ben C.H. Kuo, Vanessa Chong and Justine Joseph found that depression is high among study cohorts (Kuo, Chong and Joseph 643). Depression is linked to a number of factors that include gender, English proficiency, and acculturation. Kien, who finds herself without employment

and whose mastery of English is elusive, illustrates the findings of Furnham and Malik It is only with Agheare's help that Kien is able to find herself and rebuild her own personal space by working. As part of her recovery, her husband knew 'she needed to work again' (*Unpolished Gem* 157), even though working at her store surrounded by her husband's family makes her feel small and useless.

Like Kien, Agheare also experiences depression. One morning at the age of seventeen she wakes up 'with a false skin' on her face and feels that there is 'a funeral in her brain' (*Unpolished Gem* 177). She continues to describe her mental breakdown as a sort of degeneration and death. Although it is not made entirely clear in *Unpolished Gem* what brings about Agheare's depression, Pung signals that issues with her parents, the journey into the space between adolescence and adulthood, fear of failure and the illness and eventual death of her grandmother all accumulate into one entanglement. The death of her grandmother is a terrible blow for Agheare as she no longer possesses a reliable emotional support. She claims 'there would be no one left to remind me of my roots, no one to tell me to be proud to be a part of a thousand-year-old culture, no one to tell me that I was gold not yellow' (*Unpolished Gem* 193).

As a result of her depression, Agheare feels as if she is wasting away. The same study conducted by Furnham and Malik also finds that Asians tend to somatise symptoms of depression by manifesting their psychological distress through physical symptoms. Although the physical degeneration that Agheare experiences is imagined, it may point to a kind of somatisation. While pretending to swallow the pill prescribed by her psychiatrist, Agheare muses:

> No, it was not good. It was awful. It felt like crushed cyanide powder
>
> beneath my tongue. Specks floated on top, to the area where you taste
>
> bitterness. *Now I feel like an authentic Chinese woman, I thought. Yippee,*
>
> *adolescence is over! I'm all better now.* [Italicised in original] (*Unpolished Gem* 182)

This is perhaps one of the clearer examples of the identity crisis Agheare experiences at this age. Likening the bitterness of the pills to the image of an authentic Chinese woman, Agheare confronts the notion of the cultural perception of the fate of many Chinese women and the possible future that is in store for her. She laments a life cleaning dirty dishes and 'rubber-faced, blank-wall staring' (*Unpolished Gem* 189) and fears that that kind of monotonous life would drive her insane. Such experiences of Chinese women at home mark how spaces, particularly domestic spaces, are highly gendered.

The new house, which she describes as 'whitewashed' and 'sterile', is the setting for how Agheare's identity takes shape near the end of what is called a person's formative years. Her room, a personal space that she did not have the privilege to have when she was younger, becomes a site of solitude and privacy. It is not until her acceptance into Melbourne University that Agheare feels somewhat free, when 'all the stereotypes were fulfilled and everything is in its proper place' (*Unpolished Gem* 200) and that life is 'finally beginning to feel stable' for her.

The issues that affect Agheare in *Unpolished Gem* echo other Asian migration narratives, including Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989). The search for identity and the struggle to define oneself while living in two equally dominating cultural spheres allows the subject to be thoroughly immersed in the two cultures and yet be able to take a step back to observe from a distance. Located within two different cultures, Agheare is finally able to negotiate between the two dominating cultural forces. In her childhood, she sees these two forces as separate, but as she grows older the distinction between the two is not organised or easily deciphered. The second text, *Her Father's Daughter*, charts this development further as the narrative ventures into the art of forgetting and disremembering.

In *Unpolished Gem*, the houses that the Pung family inhabit reflect their slow acclimatisation to life in Australia. The microstructure of the family and their experiences within the houses they inhabit create a relational flow. The first home in Footscray physically

represents the family's status as refugees. It is a place that reflects the family's awe of the new land and the differences in the quality of life. It is also the place of first cross-cultural contact for the family. The second house, by contrast, reflects the family's efforts to blend into its surroundings, although the interior and exterior of the house nevertheless highlight a sense of dualism that is developing in their life. Stephanie Taylor argues that place, residences in particular, is 'an important way in which class becomes visible. The relationship of place and class is two-way: an area takes its identity from who lives there but also gives that identity back to its residents, positioning them (potentially) as a certain kind of person' (S. Taylor 52). The process of assimilation by physical acculturation is reinforced when the exterior of the house is constructed in keeping with suburban middle-class aesthetics and all signs of Chineseness are hidden inside.

The memoir's engagement with memory and identity is made clear by the way the houses reflect these phases of transition and in-betweenness that Agheare experiences. Such circumstances set off a crisis of identity in many children of migrants. For Agheare, who is constantly confronted by her Chineseness and her life within the structures of contemporary Australian life, they set off a mental breakdown. Instead of trying to be fully immersed in one culture, Agheare begins to learn to identify her position within the two cultures and creates a dual space for herself as she grows into adulthood. Weng-Ho Chong, in his review of Ien Ang's *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West*, comments that Asians are often called 'bananas' and 'coconuts' as a form of verbal racial abuse (Chong 171). And although Ien Ang and Chong call for the bananas and coconuts to be defined positively, the term connotes a sense of clear division between exterior and interior without strengthening the boundary between them. As in the context of *Unpolished Gem*, the boundary between Chineseness and Australianness is arbitrary and blurred. The banana (or coconut, for that matter) metaphor cannot be used to describe this sense of hybridity as the division between the skin and the flesh of the fruit is indistinguishable, as inferred in *Unpolished Gem*.

Her Father's Daughter

'FATHER-

His daughter is coming home. Well, not exactly home, but back to Australia. It panics him

whenever any of his children are far away.' (3)

Pung's second memoir, *Her Father's Daughter* (2011), can be seen as a continuation

of Agheare's narration. Using the memories of her father's experience under Pol Pot's rule

as a frame of reference, this memoir is articulated as a dialogue between a father and his

daughter. In contrast to *Unpolished Gem*, which centres upon memory and recollection, *Her

Father's Daughter*'s narrative focuses on acts of forgetting and disremembering. It is much

darker as it reimagines the trauma the father experienced during the civil war in Cambodia.

Issues of identity also take on a different tone; Agheare is no longer a child and more adult-

like concerns dominate the narrative. Pung's memoir implies that transitional movements

between different houses present an opening to revisit the ways in which houses and homes

are constructed and utilised as tropes for how identities are constructed.

In her book, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West* (2001), Ien Ang

suggests that hybridity is a concept that engages and challenges established boundaries, even

if it is not successful in dismantling them. Instead, it necessarily problematises borders and

destabilises identity. Ang also claims that hybridity 'best describes this world, in which the

complicated entanglement of togetherness in difference has become a 'normal' state of

affairs' (17). As we have seen in the analysis of *Unpolished Gem*, the boundedness of the

borders between a sense of Chineseness and Australianness has already been challenged. In

Her Father's Daughter, as Agheare ventures out of Australia to China, we see how these

boundaries also involve engagements with the notion of a national identity, which seems to

reflect a kind of return migration to the family's ancestral homeland.

The rich storytelling in this memoir, which covers different time periods and

narrators, revolves around the notion of 'home'. The opening sentence of the memoir

introduces the differing notions of home and brings the presence of China into the narrative, even more so than in *Unpolished Gem*, as China is no longer just a setting for the stories told by Agheare's grandmother. The opening sentence also foreshadows Pung's re-articulation of themes previously set up in *Unpolished Gem*. Clearly, China and Cambodia are taken from the background and from the past and are placed, with Australia, at the forefront of the narrative as we continue with Agheare's story.

This memoir pivots on Agheare's disorientation as she brings together a mosaic of identities through the different notions of home. Agheare's decision to exchange the family home for a personal space is seen as a kind of symbolic emancipation and autonomy prompted by the need to discover more about herself. Her flat at the residential college, and later her search for her own house, are physical achievements of her independence.

Personal discovery, the autonomy provided by financial independence, and the possession of personal space are important factors in Agheare's identity process. The desire for her own place is so strong that Agheare does not mind if she has to 'spend her mid-twenties in dowdiness if it meant that she could have a place of her own' (41). The need for one's own space echoes Virginia Woolf's argument in *A Room of One's Own* (1929). In that text, Woolf argues that that a woman needs money and her own personal space in order for her to write fiction. Her idea of a room is not confined to fiction-writing; it also suggests that women need their own personal space to be able to breathe and to be themselves.

The room is symbolic of the privacy, financial independence, and solitude that women in Woolf's time were not capable of having. In the context of this memoir, the symbolism of Woolf's room can be applied to Agheare's desire for her own space in order to be able to explore herself freely: 'She just wanted to do things, normal things that normal people approaching their mid-twenties did, without feeling guilty all the time' (*Daughter* 42). In 1959, Edward T. Hall defined personal space as a three-dimensional zone that is invisible, one in which a sort of imaginary bubble envelopes a person. This imaginary bubble

surrounds a person and allows the person to regulate his or her interactions without interference from people and forces outside the zone. A room can be conceptualised as a materialisation of this personal space. In addition to this, the road to adulthood, leaving the parental home is an important step on the road to adulthood because it helps create a self that is coherent and separate from one's parents.

And yet, in Chinese culture, staying within the family home is inextricably linked to filial duties and the status of gender, as ascribed by the notion of Chinese familism (Ting and Chiu615). Chinese familism and culture appreciate communalism over individualism. Individualism is not regarded as a desirable attribute, and in fact, it can be seen as selfish and unbeneficial for the whole family. Therefore, in Chinese culture, individualism is not seen as necessary for a person's transition to adulthood. In terms of gender status, Ting and Chiu also argue that Chinese parents tend to exercise more control over unmarried daughters because parents are traditionally responsible for their daughters' moral behaviour, and thus it is commonly unacceptable for daughters to leave the parental home. Rather, daughters are only allowed to leave the parental home when they marry because the marriage means transferring loyalty and obligations to her husband's family. However, this does not mean that it is considered an autonomous transition into adulthood.

The decision to move out was a conscious one. Despite the moral code of conduct expected of Chinese children, Agheare knowingly risks upsetting her parents. Kuan, on the other hand, cannot fathom 'his daughter's need for space and to be alone' (*Daughter* 52). The generational and cultural divide, developed by the conflict between familism and individualism between parent and child, is brought to the forefront of our attention. Despite this conflict, Kuan's decision to let the issue go highlights his recognition of the need for change. In this pragmatic change to traditional Chinese practices, Kuan believes that their life in Australia represents a 'new world' with 'an infinity of possibilities' (*Daughter* 54), and that allowing Agheare to keep to her decision reflects this new world.

For Agheare, the decision is life-changing. The fears of a pre-determined life of a Chinese woman, highlighted in *Unpolished Gem*, give way to new possibilities in her life:

> When the vice-principal showed her the apartment, it was being painted by
> two men in beige overalls. Newspapers covered the floor, and there were
> no blinds on the windows. Sunlight shone in like a beacon, to the real
> fireplace in the corner. 'This would be your flat,' said the vice-principal. It
> was the most beautiful place she had ever seen in her life, and it was
> enough to turn her white-knuckled with want. (*Daughter* 41–2)

The romantic and idealised description of a place clearly in progress is at once a projection of Agheare's desire for her own space and the future she imagines herself in. Her conscience, compounded by her desire for something she can call her own, is the driving force for taking the final step in securing that future.

Through the acquisition of the place, Agheare not only acquires a physical site but also more importantly, constructs a space for herself. The flat, therefore, has both material and metaphorical value. In the eyes of her parents, however, the flat seems inadequate and incomparable to the home they have lovingly built for their children:

> Yet when she unlocked the door to her flat, she could see the panic rise in
> their faces. Since her last visit, the rooms had been filled with furniture. ...
> She knew that this was standard-issue university furniture: the dark-brown
> wooden table with the metal legs, the foamy chair with orange, brown and
> beige stripes.
>
> …
>
> The flat had already been meticulously cleaned by the maintenance staff,
> but there was no stopping her mother. People went about their day-to-day
> business of living, but no one ever stopped to question why these migrant

women were scrubbing at dirt that was no longer there, why they loved to

wrap all furniture in plastic, or why their houses had to have white walls

and tiled floors. (*Daughter* 43)

From the passages above, it seems that Pung makes a distinction between past and future. The parental home ultimately becomes part of the 'architectures of memory' (T. Davidson 334), where it contains the accumulation of her childhood memories and experiences, such as her fears of following a monotonous and predictable future. Despite being able to live in a house with polished marble and granite, Agheare chooses 'the standard issue furniture' and other material cultural elements of the flat, signifying her resolve to construct herself differently from her parents. 'This was a room of her own' (*Daughter* 44), Agheare concludes as she lies in bed during that first night away.

Within this space, Agheare finally has complete autonomy over herself. This treasured aspect of contemporary adult life, is finally hers: 'This was what it was like to be free, to live for yourself … Perhaps she was freeing herself from the moiling mentality of her parents, free now to be a let-us-all rejoice Australian' (*Daughter* 59). She finds that this freedom and privacy have rendered her 'invisible' (*Daughter* 61), an aspect of herself that she finds appealing as she 'finds solitude in isolation' (*Daughter* 61). Achieving this has essentially changed how she views her previous residence, as the family home is transformed into 'her parents' house' (*Daughter* 45).

The notion of being a member of the second generation becomes more apparent in this memoir. The generational and cultural separation between migrant children and their parents is exhibited to a greater or lesser extent when they become young adults. Sharmila Rudrappa, in her study of Indian American immigrant families, comments that immigrant families act as depositories for ethnic culture, which binds ethnic or minority identities (Rudrappa 86-8). I believe that this influence is strongest during the formative years, as illustrated in *Unpolished Gem*. In their young adulthood, however, children of Asian migrants

tend to break away from family influence and become more immersed in the culture outside the family home. Children of migrants are different from their parents, as their immersion within the society is more fluid than that of their parents. Kuan and Kien, who visit Agheare for dinner at her flat, notice that their presence might jeopardise this process. Going out for dinner with friends from the social club is much more socially advantageous. More importantly, Kien and Kuan are afraid that the other people living in the complex will think that their daughter's refusal to have dinner with them is a sign of her being strange and anti-social. From the description of this incident, we can see that Kuan and Kien believe that their presence within Janet Clark Hall may be not only a kind of intrusion into their daughter's world, but also an impediment to their daughter's chances of being socially accepted, which is a significant issue, especially for migrants.

Pung's memoir also challenges the notion of home and homeland by juxtaposing Agheare's trip to Beijing, which is a sort of return migration, with the idea of shared memory and an imagined homecoming. This theme in the memoir explores an imaginative cultural homecoming to China after 'three generations of exile' (*Daughter* 16). 'The idea of a homeland', writes Thembisa Waetjen, 'is a place embodying social essences, cultural or historical, that legitimate claims to a natural sovereignty. A homeland is the landscape also of historical memory that offers tangible images of rootedness and grounded community' (654). From Waetjen's definition, we note that the idea of the homeland is tied up with notions of place, identity, and shared or collective memory. Often, the image of the homeland articulates ideas about the nation as home (Cowen 757; Blunt and Dowling 174). Commenting on the concept of diaspora, Avtar Brah suggests that diaspora presents an analysis of the idea of fixed or primordial ties to the ancestral homeland (Brah 196). By heading to China, Agheare addresses the issue surrounding the myth of a common ancestry (Connor 36).

Notions of home, homeland and a sort of homecoming necessitate the recasting or passing down of memories of home from one generation to another. But, as previously seen in *Unpolished Gem*, collective memories of China are passed on through the act of storytelling by the grandmother, and not through Agheare's parents. For Kuan, China too seems like a foreign land, because he was born and raised in Cambodia. For him, Cambodia represents the most vivid memory of a particular homeland. The atrocities of civil war have kept these memories muted. Even if these memories are disremembered or occluded, however, they are still being articulated through Kuan's actions, as will be discussed.

Going back to Agheare's 'homecoming' to China, she is confronted by the disconnect she experiences with her supposed ancestral homeland. In the memoir, Agheare tells of her plan to write her new book: 'This story begins on a bus. The bus rolls down dirt roads, and when it stops, she will disembark and scoop up soil and kiss the land of her ancestors and tell the world how good it is to be home at last' (*Daughter* 11). Being in Chaozhou, however, stirs no acute emotion within Agheare. She does not experience the expected popping sensation in 'the middle of her chest' (*Daughter* 13), nor does she finally feel at home.

The children who look so much like herself are, in fact, very different and they feel the same way about her. Their cultural disconnection is apparent and Agheare is just one of those 'foreign ghosts' (*Daughter* 12). Her attempt at excavating family history through her visit to China yields nothing but the realisation of her subject position as Asian Australian. The feeling of unbelonging and alienation is thus made more acute in China. Pung, in an online interview by Jane Sullivan, comments, 'So I was a complete foreigner in China. I enjoyed being there but the irony was I was supposed to be inspired by China and I felt such alienation' (theage.com.au).And yet, the inclusion of racial minorities in efforts to promote multiculturalism in the country has become tokenistic (T. Khoo 28).

There seems to be a disconnection between romanticised notions of cultural heritage and the realities of returning. The idea of a collective memory and a shared history, instilled in her by the stories of her grandmother and the cultural practices at home, in part reflect the nostalgia of migrant elders. Her plans to start her new book with 'such heart-starting stories of homecoming' (*Daughter* 8) change once she realises that she does not feel the familiarity and sense of belonging that usually accompany such tales. Instead, she experiences the feeling of being a 'fish-out-of-water' (*Daughter* 38) and decides to conclude her journey in China by pronouncing that 'it was dead, dead, dead, and she might as well keep it closed' (*Daughter* 8).

Following the debunking of the myth of primordial ties to China, Agheare's focus shifts to something closer to home. Through hearing about the experiences of her father during wartime Cambodia, Agheare believes that not only will she understand more about her father, but in turn, she will probably understand more about herself as well. However, instead of beginning with the story of Kuan's experiences in Cambodia, Pung clarifies that the memoir is not a story about a refugee and his triumphant life in Australia. Instead, the story revolves around the profound love of a father for his family.

Kuan's story revolves around the act of disremembering and occlusion. His memories of time in Cambodia are relatively mute and are articulated through performative acts. The often baffling habits Kuan exhibits around the house, such as sawing off the sharp tips of kitchen knives and insisting on sleeping with the lights on, are signs of a troubling past. Just like Kien's depression in *Unpolished Gem*, Kuan's actions may be a manifestation of what psychologists term post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is symptomatic of the survivors of the Cambodian Killing Fields. But he neither acknowledges nor recognises psychological and emotional distress:

> After his daughter returned from her first trip to China, pallid-faced and
> sunken-cheeked, she kept asking him questions. Tactful ones, because of

course she'd probably read up on books about post-traumatic stress

disorder or whatever rubbish Western doctors made up to stop a person

from moving on in life, to extract exorbitant sums by sitting them down

and making them talk. Talk led to nothing and nowhere. It was action that

got a man places, that pulled him up and out of the quagmire and into a

new country … Minding your own business – that's what he had done all

his life. That was how he had survived all those years under Pol Pot, and

minding his own business was how he'd made a living in Australia.

(*Daughter* 197)

A recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* shows a high

rate of psychological illnesses among Cambodian refugees, with 62 percent of Cambodian

refugees suffering from PTSD (Marshall et. al 571-9). However, Kuan deals with his PTSD

in his own way. He manages to deal with the stress by going about the house making it as

safe as possible for his family and putting an effort into trying to forge a comfortable life

for them in their new homeland. The trauma experienced in Cambodia is a driving force

for a better life in Australia.

A better life in Australia is also contingent on the impression one makes on

Australians. Memories of Cambodia are too bitter and unpleasant to share with Australians.

When Agheare asks her father for more suggestions for her writing, his concern centres

upon whether or not her Australian readers would enjoy such stories. "Do you think there

is too much suffering in the Cambodian part?' he says, 'Maybe white people don't want to

read about too much suffering. It depresses them.' (*Daughter* 193) Later on, Agheare realises

that:

through his quest for modernity and utmost mobility, he has given his

children a completely different history, drilled into them that they were

part of a Chinese culture that spanned centuries, which was true; made

sure they were also aware that they were bonafide born-in-Australia kids.

But in doing so, he had wiped out the most significant part of their

identity. (*Daughter* 193)

This passage again brings forward the issue of identity. In deciding to omit Cambodia from the narratives of his life and the lives of his children Kuan is, without a doubt, assuming responsibility for protecting them from traumatising memories. Her shift in focus leads Agheare to understand that the quirks of the older generation are all part of a protective mechanism of disremembering. This disremembering is largely for the benefit of their Australian children, who were born in the land of 'golden soil and wealth for toil' (*Daughter* 195).

Agheare realises that Cambodia is an important site of memory for understanding her father and herself. Unsettled by this realisation, Agheare wishes to visit the land where half her family perished during the genocide. Kuan, however, 'would never let her go to Cambodia' (*Daughter* 195), and it takes her ten years to convince him to allow her to visit the country. Once they are there, Kuan muses that 'his daughters were so foreign. They shook hands with all the bank staff and smiled at the wrong people' (*Daughter* 204). He realises that the upbringing that he had sought for his daughters back in Australia had made them soft; that they have seen 'too much of the good stuff in life' (*Daughter* 204). Even so, when in Cambodia, the family tries their best to shelter Agheare and Alina from witnessing the signs of the civil war and treats them like tourists. They are whisked away from the bloody history the country has seen, in favour of places such as the Angkor Wat Temple and the Tonle Sap Lake floating village. Remnants and scars of Pol Pot's atrocities, housed in the genocide museum, are kept away. This meeting of cultural history and identity within past and present enables Agheare to understand more about herself.

The proliferation of tropes attached to the notion of home in *Her Father's Daughter* convey the processes in which Agheare's identity evolves. The space represented by the flat,

is what Agheare needs in order to develop from the self that is last seen in *Unpolished Gem*. In a way, Agheare's trip to Cambodia in her effort to understand her family history is also a significant part of her journey to form her own personal identity.

Conclusion

Alice Pung's two memoirs, *Unpolished Gem* and *Her Father's Daughter*, highlight the engagement of memory and identity as projected through ideas of home. In *Unpolished Gem*, we can see a clear trajectory of Agheare's developing sense of self during her formative years up until young adolescence.. Pung's decision to begin the memoir with the line, 'This story does not begin on a boat' (*Unpolished Gem* 1) sets the tone of the memoir and focuses on the family's fortunes in Australia rather than the horrors that have led to the family's displacement.

The homes in *Unpolished Gem* are vehicles for remembering the histories of the women and the influence they have on Agheare's life. The shared memory passed down from grandmother to grandchild and the reimagined experiences and memories of her mother within the three homes have not only become cultural repositories, but also help to anchor Agheare's sense of ethnic identity through acts of remembering. The houses in *Unpolished Gem*, nonetheless, illustrate Kien's experiences of alienation. Her duties at home and her inability to speak English exclude her from actively participating in both family and social life.

In contrast, *Her Father's Daughter* focuses more on acts of disremembering and occlusion within different notions of home space. It is a continuation of Agheare's narrative that uses memory and home as a framework. In this memoir, we are beginning to see Agheare as an individual who is developing an identity that portrays her subject position as a young second–generation Asian Australian. In *Unpolished Gem*, Agheare's formative identity is closely associated to the sense of Chineseness, which ensures a measure of cultural continuity for the second generation. By contrast, in *Her Father's Daughter*, the continuing

development of identity is backed by Agheare's notions of individuality and by the realisation of her Asian Australianness. This process is contingent on examining her father's memories, which, unlike *Unpolished Gem*, are never openly shared.

Both memoirs complement each other in a way that highlights the journey of one person to discover herself. The transition from childhood, to adolescence and finally adulthood is wrought with fear, confusion, and anxiety, accumulating in an understanding of herself. Every dwelling space that appears in the two memoirs serves to emphasise this trajectory and journey; each illustrates how Agheare is evolving as a person. Agheare's construction of identity is by no means complete and shows that identity is an ongoing process and is always in transition. What is more important is that the two memoirs project the idea that Asian Australian identities are not singular, and challenge the notion of the Asian Other. From an analysis of Pung's texts in reference to home spaces, I now move to experiences within a more communal site, more specifically the idea of Chinatown, to continue the examination of contemporary Asian Australian identities and their relationship with different cultural sites.

Chapter Three

Articulations of Chinatown and Ethnic Businesses in _Growing Up Asian in Australia_ (2008)

Introduction

In Kim Cheng Boey's poem, "Chinatowns" (2012), the speaker describes the fluid and porous nature of Chinatown as a cultural space. The character of Chinatown is traced by highlighting the struggles over mobility, identity and belonging:

> Over and over you study the menus, the recipes, the difficult names
>
> of herbs and roots, the cures that awaken a forgotten hunger.
>
> You scour these Chinatowns of the mind, translating them
>
> Like sutras Xuan Zang fetched from India, testing ways
>
> return might be possible against these homesick inventions,
>
> trace the traveller's alien steps across borders, and in between
>
> discover how transit has a way of lasting, the way these Chinatowns
>
> grew out of not knowing to return or to stay, and then become
>
> home. (1-8)

Boey's poem describes Chinatown as an almost palimpsestic and 'organic' landscape that is constantly evolving through the accounts of the people that inhabit this space. It is a site that bears witness to the endless convergence of individuals who come from all walks of life, each bringing with them their own stories. As will be examined in this chapter, Chinatown is a cultural space that has the ability to awaken the desire in some people to explore and to try and make sense of the notion of difference. It is also a space that allows some Asian Australians to revisit or reclaim part of culture that is fragmented or inadvertently lost, through a sense of shared histories and memories. For others, Chinatown allows for

them to feel a sense of belonging to an otherwise foreign culture. These different reactions to Chinatown form a part of the fabric of contemporary Asian identities in Australia.

Following from the examination of domestic spaces in Alice Pung's texts as sites that depict the evolution of identity, this chapter will study articulations of Chinatown and, by extension, ethnic businesses, as another kind of extended space that perpetuates ideas of belonging and identity for members of various Asian communities. The multiple allusions to this space in the anthology *Growing Up Asian in Australia* show how Chinatown looms large within the imaginations of Asian Australians as a material place and as a repository for memories. It is a place for recovering broken histories and negotiating identities.

This anthology is a set of personal accounts, essays, poetry, and short stories that deal with what it means to be Asian in Australia. The anthology problematises the notion of a homogenous, singular, and essentialised Asian Australian identity and sense of belonging. At the same time, these personal accounts help challenge many popular Asian stereotypes. Binding the collection together is a set of counter-narratives that show that within the construct of a single sense of 'Chineseness' and 'Asia', there is a complex web of internal differences. In her introduction to the anthology, Alice Pung comments:

> Whether growing up in the 1950s with ancestry from the gold-rush days,
> or arriving more recently and attempting to find solidarity in schoolyard
> friendship, our authors show us what it is like behind these stereotypes.
> Asian–Australians have often been written about by outsiders, as outsiders.
> Here, they tell their own stories. (1)

These writers and their stories give an account of what lies behind the 'Asian Australian' label and challenge the notion that 'Asianness' is a singular experience. In fact, their narratives show how diverse Asian communities are in Australia, and this diversity highlights ethnic, class, gender, sexuality, generational, and historical differences. These differences are traced in how they are engaged in response to the space of Chinatown.

At the same time, representations of Chinatown and ethnic businesses in the anthology raise the question of the unboundedness of these sites. The boundaries of Chinatown are permeable, allowing characters to step within or to step outside of its space. This fluidity, in effect, points to the increasing interconnectedness and hybridity of Asian identities, particularly for those of the second generation and beyond. Ironically, in some of the stories this aspect of Chinatown's boundaries also allows the reinforcement of ethnic and identity consciousness. Asians in Australia, however, are not necessarily bounded by characters that are based on specific territories. Chinatown is presented as a transitionary space, a location whose boundaries continuous waves of migrants choose to enter, and after a period of time and after having experienced life within, decide whether to stay or to leave.

Growing Up Asian in Australia (GUAIA) is autobiographical in nature. These personal stories highlight the childhood struggles of the contributors who have dealt, in varying degrees, with issues of identity and belonging within an Australian milieu. Not all of the narratives in the anthology deal exclusively with Chinatown, nor are they explicit analyses of the space; some refer to Chinatown and ethnic businesses only in passing, but these references are invaluable resources that allow us to examine their material and symbolic importance within Asian Australian identity narratives. With this in mind, I argue that these spatial references, which regularly reappear and are rearticulated in different forms throughout the anthology, illustrate how Asian Australian writers intertwine spatiality with identity politics to elucidate the struggles of being Asian and Australian.

Before proceeding to the examination of how Chinatown is represented in the anthology, however, it is first necessary to look at the social history and the cultural importance of Chinatown for both Australians and Asian Australians. The following section is a brief account of how Chinatown has changed from a perceived 'ethnic' ghetto into a public urban space, tourism icon, and heritage site.

A Brief Social History of Chinatown

The idea of 'Chinatown' can be seen as developing out of the imaginary need to control and limit the threat of Chinamen and their culture in Western societies. More often than not, past Western discourses characterised Chinatown as an immoral, and unsanitary ethnic ghetto. These descriptions create what Edward Said theorises as 'imaginative geographies' (Said 54-5), which work to sustain white cultural hegemony over the threat of the Chinese 'Other'. The many Chinese who arrived in Australia to work in the gold fields during the nineteenth century were seen as a threat not only to this sense of territoriality, but they were perceived as a cultural menace and a source of economic competition for Australian miners. Through these imagined threats, feelings of hostility and resentment towards the Chinese gradually developed in Western countries, including Australia, contributing to the creation of enclaves many of which are now known as 'Chinatown'. In its initial stages, Chinatown was an imaginary entity onto which stereotypical Western perceptions of the Chinese were projected.

Place-naming is an important method of constructing, promoting, or silencing identities. Just as Paul Carter, in *The Road to Botany Bay* (1988), highlights how the politics of place-naming has transformed the landscape of Australia, the name 'Chinatown', as a designation of Chinese settlements, was also a significant political act. Dominant groups often use place-naming as an attempt to marginalise and drive undesired groups to the fringes of society. Yat-Ming Loo, when commenting on the struggles of the Chinese Malaysian community against state-sponsored representation and the changes to a rapidly developing Kuala Lumpur, mentions the strong resistance against the creation of Chinatown in the city (847). Loo stresses that the resistance demonstrates the anxiety of the Chinese community over state efforts to minoritise them. In a similar fashion, the creation of 'Chinatown' in Australia can be seen as a manipulation of symbolic capital to further monopolise, control, and marginalise the Chinese community. Yet, for the Chinese, Chinatown has evolved to become a major cultural site: an enclave that articulates the efforts of the Chinese to construct

a space for themselves in a once hostile environment. It is a space that helps the Chinese to resist the forced imposition of white imaginary constructions of 'Chinatown'.

An enclave, as defined by Mark Abrahamson, is an area whose residents are bound together by commonalities, such as geography, language, culture, or predicament. Everyday practices help to reinforce the ethos of a shared sense of home, belonging, and kinship in people who inhabit a specific enclave (13). Whether from individual activity or organised rural social organisation, these activities are an extension of normalised practices from the homeland, which are rearticulated within an Australian setting (Gregory et. al 81). In short, Chinatown is an extended China, or, to use Benedict Anderson's term, an imagined community: a created space where its residents sought refuge not only from the image of the 'Other', but also from violence, whether real or imagined, within a growing hostile environment.

Hostility and acts of violence were perpetrated against members of Chinese communities in Australia during the nineteenth century. Animosity and resentment at the different customs of the Chinese and uncontrolled rumours led to anti-Chinese violence and riots in states such as New South Wales and Victoria. The passing of legislations, such as *An Act to Make Provision for Certain Immigrants 1855* in Victoria, seemed to legalise anti-Chinese sentiment (Cronin 6). An episode of this hostility towards the Chinese can be seen in the raiding and pillaging of the Chinese camps in the Victorian Buckland River goldfields when on 4th July 1857, the Chinese miners working there were beaten by white rioters (Fitzgerald 38). This anti-Chinese sentiment, coupled with a discriminatory immigration policy that institutionalised discrimination and racism, ensured prolonged intolerance and perception of the Chinese as the Other.

The 1970s and 1980s, however, brought in a global change of attitude. Policies that promoted the assimilation of immigrants into the dominant Australian culture and which had dominated state strategies gave way to emerging ideas of pluralism and multiculturalism.

In effect, this ultimately changed people's perceptions of the Chinese and the idea of Chinatown. By the 1990s, Australia as a multicultural nation had become a familiar concept, only to be abruptly disrupted by Hansonian politics in the mid-1990s. Policies of multiculturalism are, in essence, aimed at reshaping Australia's national identity so far as to transform the country into a new state of being (Ang and Stratton 22-3, 28). However, official policies and everyday experiences of minority groups contradicted each other. On this issue, Ang and Stratton stress that:

> There is a gap between the neat official representation of 'multicultural
>
> Australia', on the one hand, and the contradictory everyday experiences
>
> and historical memories of these people, on the other — experiences and
>
> memories which remain unaccounted for, or are even denied and
>
> disclaimed, by the official discourse. ("Multiculturalism in Crisis: The New
>
> Politics of Race and National Identity in Australia" 26)

Despite this polarity between official policy and the realities of Australian multiculturalism, Chinatown seems to be the setting and focal point of change towards a more multicultural Australia. From being looked upon as an abhorred ethnic ghetto, Chinatown has changed into the physical articulation of cultural diversity. As Kay Anderson has put it:

> Chinatowns have become ethnic expressions par excellence. The policy of
>
> multiculturalism has given official sanction to vibrations within white
>
> Australia since the early 1970s that Chinatown is a symbol of difference to
>
> be protected rather than censured; revitalised, not left to the levelling
>
> forces of assimilation. ("Chinatown Re-Oriented': A Critical Analysis of
>
> Recent Redevelopment Schemes in a Melbourne and Sydney Enclave" 2)

The concept of Chinatown, therefore, has become a source of cultural capital to promote ideas of multiculturalism and attract tourists, who largely contribute to the economy and consumerism in Chinatown.

Unfortunately, efforts to position Chinatown within a multicultural paradigm have involuntarily helped perpetuate the perception of a single Chinese and/or Asian identity. In short, efforts to promote diversity on a macro-level have inadvertently silenced the multiplicity and plurality that exists within the notion of Asian Australianness. Ironically, despite the evolution of Chinatown from an unwanted space into a desired (and often exoticised) one, Anderson believes that contemporary ideas of Chinatown may impose notions of an 'authentic' Asian culture. This at once demonstrates the power of white Australia, in both popular and official consciousness, 'to dramatise and reinforce the idea of Chinatown as an 'ethnic' urban enclave' (145).

This unintentionally renders Chinatown as, what Kevin Hetherington calls, a heterotopia, or a space 'of alternative ordering' (39, 53). Michel Foucault, who first used the term, describes heterotopias as similar to the idea of utopia (Foucault and Misckowiec 24). Heterotopia is an idea that the spaces that surround a particular subject have the potential to reduce a person's sense of identity and decrease the sense of independence in an individual. This concept reflects the play between the power that societies possess and the capacity to utilise this power over persons who are the 'Other'. Although he describes utopias as sites of idealised happiness, Foucault also argues that in reality utopias do not exist. Heterotopias, on the other hand, do exist, and their existence threatens, disturbs, and challenges, contemporary ideas of space, power and identity.

The commercial potential of Chinatown has also been capitalised by both its residents and the state as a cultural commodity. As in the case of most Chinatowns around the world, Chinatowns in Australia are often popularised as urban tourist attractions and Asian food hubs, with a growing clientele. Commercial trade, particularly that which is

centred on ethnic businesses, is a staple of Chinatown. Unsurprisingly, Asian business owners in the area are 'willing to indulge romantic conceptions of the Chinese' (K. Anderson 149). What was initially a trade established to sustain members of the Chinese communities is now a growing business capitalising on the ethnic and the exotic. Food is a huge part of this business, a motif that reoccurs in not only the anthology and other Asian Australian writing, but also in non-Asian writing in Australia. The spatial capital of Chinatown and ethnic business spaces provide a physically identifiable spectacle for those who are not associated with the space.

Compared to its image in the past, today's Chinatown is a vibrant, transnational space. What was once a settlement of the mainland Chinese communities has been transformed into a site of convergence for the influx of Chinese from other communities around the world, such as from Taiwan, the Philippines, and Malaysia, as well as members of other communities, such as the Cambodians, Vietnamese, Thai, and Koreans. With contributions from other cultural groups, Chinatown is now a diasporic immigrant space. What was once a closed communal organisation that is affiliated only to a sense of 'Chineseness' has evolved into a central urban space with a nexus of different affiliations and a diverse (and mostly) East and Southeast Asian demographic. In her study of Sydney's Chinatown, Ang stresses that Chinatown is no longer a Chinese space and questions if it ever was one ("At home in Asia? Sydney's Chinatown and Australia's 'Asian Century'" 2). Today, Chinatown is a transnational space that is porous and hybrid, and is becoming increasingly diverse and heterogeneous. This constant movement into, within, and out of Chinatown changes it into a palimpsestic and mosaic space.

This does not indicate, however, that a sense of 'Chineseness' no longer exists within the spatial boundaries of Chinatown, nor is it completely manipulated or appropriated by the spectacle that has developed around it as a physical articulation of multicultural policies and tourism. 'Chineseness' is still a central model in the construction and evolution of this space;

and of how its inhabitants engage with and travel through its boundaries. The problem, however, lies within how 'Chineseness' is perceived as a singular construct and, as Ien Ang observes:

> Chineseness is not a category with a fixed content — be it racial, cultural
> or geographical – but operates as an open and indeterminate signifier
> whose meanings are constantly renegotiated and rearticulated in different
> sections of the Chinese diaspora. Being Chinese outside China cannot
> possibly be the same thing as inside. It varies from place to place, moulded
> by the local circumstances in different parts of the world … There are, in
> this paradigm, many different Chinese identities, not one. ("Can one say no
> to Chineseness? Pushing the limits of the diasporic paradigm" 225)

'Chineseness,' then, varies according to whether one is within the national boundaries of China or otherwise. In extension, I argue that a sense of 'Chineseness' also differs within the reconstruction of literary Chinatowns, where voices and experiences diverge, converge, or coexist while simultaneously sustaining their separateness. Chinatown, therefore, is a space that showcases the intersecting subjectivities of its inhabitants.

Ethnic businesses are also a major part of this discussion. Not necessarily confined within the boundaries of Chinatown and Asian communities, ethnic business spaces are, more often than not, based on the grounds of kinship; they are closely-knit enterprises that place a strong emphasis on family and networking between friends, signalling a strong sense of fraternal relationship. Usually, ethnic businesses would rope in family members as part of the workforce. They are often significant contributors to the growth of other ethnic businesses. Restaurants offering Asian cuisine, for example, help to support Asian vegetables farms, factories, and other small enterprises (B. Wong 39). Restaurants, electronics shops, and grocers all make up a larger commercial network. These businesses also capitalise on or make use of the growing search for ethnic exoticism within Australian culture.

These businesses may also help to counteract essentialised notions of identities and ethnicities by advertising diversity through their merchandise and wares. Restaurants, for example, play a crucial role by playing with the increasing penchant for people to seek different gastronomic experiences. They help to promote the significant differences between Chinese groups such as Hokkien, Cantonese, and Hainanese, and between the various Asian communities such as Thai, Vietnamese, Malaysian, and Korean, and they simultaneously highlight the vibrancy of these cultures.

However, despite the transformation of Chinatown from an unwanted space into a desirable place, and the cultural visibility that ethnic business enterprises bring, there is still little recognition by the larger society of these differences within and between them. The myth of a homogenous Chinese-Asian identity, which is a major theme in this chapter, is still strong despite the diversity of Asian communities in Australia. The narratives in *Growing Up Asian in Australia* provide representations of how Chinatown and ethnic businesses can act to demystify this misleading notion and show how diverse and complex the entanglements of identity are, within and beyond the boundaries of Chinatown.

Internal Differences: The Breaking Down of Essentialist Notions of Identity

In many of the stories collected in *Growing Up Asian in Australia*, the rhetoric of Chinatown and ethnic businesses articulate transgenerational subjectivities. As examined in the previous chapter, there seems to be a tension between diversity and efforts that contribute to cultural continuity, and this tension often creates conflict across generations. Members of the older generation view the necessity for the preservation and continuation of cultural identity, whereas younger Asian Australians are more inclined to be engaged with other cultures and adopt the cultural practices of others. The experiences of the older generation, however, are not something insignificant. In fact, one of the key concerns within

the narrative in the anthology points to how Chinatown and ethnic business spaces function as a locus for memory, familiarity, and belonging for older generations of Asian Australians.

Amy Choi's story, "The Relative Advantages of Learning My Language", follows a period of the narrator's childhood, when she reminisces about her relationship with her maternal grandfather. The narrator, who is a third-generation Chinese, admits to not having had the closest of relationships with her late grandfather. Choi's narrative problematises intergenerational angst, which confirms the assimilation or acculturation of migrant children and also the otherness of the elderly.

This intergenerational angst in immigrant narratives usually arises because of an engagement between Eastern and Western cultures, although as has been discussed earlier, these two classifications are not always so clearly demarcated. In a family structure and hierarchy, as in the case of Choi's narrative, the older generation has the added responsibility of passing on the family's cultural history and tradition to the younger generation. The issue of cultural transmission and/or continuity forms a major part of Asian diasporic literatures as first generation migrants actively seek ways to ensure the continuity and longevity of their cultural heritage. This task, nevertheless, conflicts with the cultural disposition of the younger generation, and may result in their resistance to such efforts. Whether Australian-born or raised in Australia, the children of migrant parents tend to assimilate or adapt better than their elders. People who are older, however, may be perceived as trapped in a cultural paralysis. This inertia experienced by the older Asian Australians is pitted against the energy of younger Asian Australians and shows the conflict and interplay between these two opposing experiences.

Language, which is a fundamental need in order for people to communicate with one another, forms part of this angst. Choi's narrative highlights how central the issue of language is by demonstrating the narrator's conscious decision to stop learning Chinese and her resistance to her grandfather's efforts to teach her the art of traditional Chinese poetry. The

narrator comments, 'I didn't see the point of speaking Chinese. We lived in Australia' (*GUAIA* 7), thus effectively abandoning any effort to learn the language. However, a portion of immigrants, especially the elderly, lacks the fluency of the English language and are often immobilised by their 'monolingualism'. My use of the term 'monolingualism' is deliberate. I believe that even if immigrants were to know more than one language, not knowing the language of the host country would still render them effectively monolingual.

As seen in the previous chapter, language is a powerful agent. Not having the ability to speak the language of the dominant culture will lead to decreased participation in the society. In turn, this can lead to an increased sense of alienation and isolation from not only the host culture but also from members of the person's own family. This is the case with the grandfather, who could not fully understand the English language. Because of his poor grasp of the language he is unable to communicate effectively with his grandchildren, who have all grown up with English as their mother tongue. This limitation also prevents him from participating in broader civil, socio-cultural and political activities, which in turn adds to his sense of alienation. To remedy this stress created by the language barrier, the grandfather finds a sense of solace and kinship within the boundaries of Chinatown by immersing himself within its familiarity. Some portions of Choi's story highlight this theme, as it alludes to a particular Chinese restaurant in Chinatown as being a site of belonging for the narrator's grandfather:

> Monday to Friday, Grandad went to the city, dressed in a suit with a
> waistcoat, a hat, and carrying his walking stick. He would take the bus to
> the station, the train to the city, the tram to Little Bourke Street. On
> Mondays, he'd be sitting at a large round table at Dragon Boat Restaurant
> with other old Chinese men. Tuesdays to Fridays, he was at a small square
> table by himself with a pot of tea and the Chinese newspaper. (*GUAIA* 7)

The Dragon Boat Restaurant on Little Bourke Street, which is part of Melbourne's Chinatown, is used by the narrator's grandfather as a communal site for his social activities. It is a place for catching up with old friends who may also experience the same predicament. As well, the restaurant is a space for the grandfather to spend some time by himself for most of the week. The grandfather's routine is reflective of how Chinatown functions as a gathering site for the Chinese community, especially for members of the older generation, who may experience difficulties adjusting to the host culture. For the grandfather, Chinatown has become an important part of his life. This is demonstrated in the way that, despite his failing mental and physical health, the grandfather is able to instinctively make his way to Chinatown.

The notion of 'oldness' also plays a pivotal role in the alienation of the elderly. Factors such as cultural differences, language, education, and economic dispositions are often taken into account in stories about the lives of older immigrants. The sense of oldness is also an aspect of otherness and difference that has received little recognition (Kalish and Moriwaki 188). Richard Kalish and Sharon Moriwaki, whose article focuses on the predicament of elderly Asian Americans, find that San Francisco's Chinatown is an example of how Chinatown has become a socio-cultural mecca for the Chinese American elderly across North America. They believe that this factor has made being both elderly and Asian-American a unique characteristic that informs a unique experience, particularly during the 1970s (190). Granted, Kalish and Moriwaki's work is limited to the American socio-historical landscape. I believe, however, that their work contains a parallel within Asian Australian communities and thus can be applied to the examination of the experiences of the Asian elderly in an Australian context.

Kalish and Moriwaki's concept of 'oldness' is similar to the notion of ageism. In general, ageism refers to discrimination against people because of their age. This form of discrimination may lead to, among other things, a sense of isolation and loneliness among

the elderly. Today, there are a number of older communities that seek to counter such ageism by encouraging members to take part in cohort activities such as golfing and travelling. The increasing recognition of how spatiality affects the elderly has also prompted the growing need to address the spatial configurations of the elderly with their changing lifestyle (Phillipson 330). With their age, the elderly are also experiencing a series of often-overlapping migrations themselves.

The creation of spaces for the elderly, such as retirement villages and neighbourhoods, helps to remedy psychological issues among the elderly by decreasing spaces of exclusion. However, countering ageism is a move that is largely contingent upon other factors, which include ethnicity, culture, class, and gender. In the case of the elderly in ethnic minority communities, there is limited opportunity to counter or deal with the impact of ageism. Asian communities, in particular, have yet to embrace such spaces and prefer to have senior members of the family with them within the home space. In Choi's narrative, Chinatown is symbolically reconfigured by the grandfather and other elderly people as an inclusive space, a place where they can spend their time in when the decrease in their physiological fitness increases the number of exclusionary spaces.

The loss of social roles may also be one of the key factors that contribute to the creation of these exclusionary spaces. With the onset of old age, elderly folk may lose a number of the social roles they have been accustomed to when they were younger. Within the family unit, for example, they may lose the power to make decisions about family matters as more responsibilities are delegated to other family members, such as their adult children. The possible shift from being the breadwinner of the family to a non-contributing member would lead to a loss of the sense of self-worth and identity.

The literary re-enactment of the grandfather's daily routine in the Chinese restaurant located within the boundaries of Chinatown suggests how the grandfather moves from a space of exclusion at home, which is embedded with an accidental form of 'othering'. This

form of othering is attributed to the differences that arise from family life and the engagement with the host culture which are contrasted with a sense of familiarity provided by the cultural setting of Chinatown. There, in the company of like-minded friends, familiar food, and discernible language, the grandfather is no longer the 'Other' but becomes part of the circle. The strong attachment the grandfather has to his habitual place in the restaurant alludes to Yi-Fu Tuan's notion of 'topophilia'. In his book, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (1974), Tuan refers to a strong bond that has developed between individuals and communities, associated with a particular place (4). So important is the restaurant to the preservation of his sense of self and identity that his sudden decrease in cognition does little to interfere with his attachment to the place. At the conclusion of Choi's text, the 'ethnic' setting would also later prove to be important to the narrator; the space provides her with an opportunity to learn the Chinese language so that she will be in a position to listen to the anxieties of the elderly as they confront and negotiate an entanglement of stress factors in their old age. The narrator's inability to speak Chinese and the subsequent loss of communication with her grandfather highlight the struggle surrounding the notion of identity between the two generations. Many young Asian Australians, particularly those from the second generation and beyond, exhibit the loss of the language of their parents. As demonstrated in Choi's narrative, the loss of language affects the communication between members of the two generations, resulting in a lack of understanding between the two. For the grandfather, however, finding the familiar sense of home in old age is something acutely painful. This loss of language brings forth the theme of the transgenerational differences between the grandfather and the narrator. While Chinatown functions differently for each person, it ultimately helps the narrator to better her understanding of her grandfather and partially to regain a sense of affinity with the Chinese language.

The *leitmotif* of trying to find a link to home and a sense of self is also present in the way ethnic business spaces are presented in the anthology. These spaces serve as a fixed point

for those who live their lives away from family, who long and search for the feeling of being 'at home'. This occurs in Hop Dac's "Pigs from Home", a story about a Vietnamese's family's efforts to financially sustain themselves by rearing pigs and raising poultry in their backyard. After moving away from the family home and settling in Footscray, a Melbourne suburban area with a large Southeast Asian migrant population, the narrator would visit restaurants that served Vietnamese food, such as Pho. The narrator would order these, with an addition of pig's blood sausage, a combination that would remind him of his mother's cooking, his childhood and home, although 'home' is still within the confines of the adopted nation's borders. The environment of ethnic business spaces, such as the Vietnamese restaurant in Dac's text, provides a space that engages the subject's senses and memories, and thus allows the person to establish an essential link to 'home'. The pig's blood in food at the Vietnamese restaurant, therefore, is used as an idiom to express the narrator's connection with the memory of the family's struggles to rear pigs during his childhood, showing the nostalgic importance of the pig's blood sausage in adulthood.

Ivy Tseng's "Chinese Lessons" exhibits how young Asian Australians struggle with their heritage.. Tseng's narrative highlights her attempts at mastering Mandarin and the strict instruction the father had devised for his daughters. Her failure to grasp the language, instead developing a pidgin she calls Chinglish, demonstrate the struggles of the younger generation to fulfil expectations of their elders to ensure the longevity of their cultural heritage while at the same time carrying the burden of 'making it' in the new country. The Mandarin lessons taught by the father are a step to ensure that 'his three Australian-born and bred daughters recognised that their Chineseness was not restricted to their black hair, small round noses and consumption of rice' (*GUAIA* 18) and that learning Mandarin will reinforce their cultural inheritance. Although the narrator did not fully grasp the Mandarin language, there is an appreciation for its association with Chinese culture and its long history. The regret that the narrator feels later in life is palpable as she describes:

I could eat at a Chinese restaurant, one of those bustling, raucous ones that

line the boulevard of Chinatown in Sydney, and order in Mandarin,

eavesdropping on Mandarin conversations around me as I slurp up soft,

squidgy noodles, slick from a hot, salty broth. Maybe I'd feel more

authentic in some way. (*GUAIA* 20)

Her vision of utilising Mandarin to reclaim a sense of authenticity points to the dilemma of experiencing a hyphenated identity that tends to plague migrant children and children of migrant parents. Being 'Taiwanese-Chinese-Australian' (*GUAIA* 21) is an entangled web of associations, with the 'Australian' part of her identity dominating the matrix. This entanglement of identities is at the crux of the different narratives within this anthology, which are then projected within the space of Chinatown and businesses. With the Chinese restaurant and, by extension, Chinatown, she could envision what could have been a sense of belonging that is now only a removed sense of nostalgia. This vision is partially romanticised, as the narrator seems to overcompensate her desire to have a sense of belonging by idealising a sense of being authentically Chinese. In the case of Tseng's story, the representation of Chinatown as a cultural space helps to remedy the entanglement of identities for the narrator. The narrator is in part able to recover some semblance of her cultural heritage within the space of the Chinese restaurants she visits in Chinatown.

As demonstrated in the two texts, Chinatown is an important nexus for the discourse on transgenerational subjectivities within different Asian Australian communities. The constant struggle to find a habitual place of belonging and familiarity is embedded within the spatial poetics of a person's environment. The personal stories of people such as the grandfather in Choi's narrative, and the narrator in Hop Dac's, signify Chinatown and ethnic business spaces as landscapes that are therapeutic. For the narrators of Tseng's and Choi's texts, Chinatown also represents a space for them to (re)discover, recover and reclaim broken histories, and forgotten cultures and heritages.

In fact, ethnic economic action is also a reflection of the search for familiarity. By establishing a familiar business, people also create a sense of normalcy within a space that is always in flux. Asian vegetable stalls, grocery shops, food stores, video rental shops and other similar enterprises, whether or not they are geographically located in Chinatown (or other such settlements), reflect an attempt to recreate an extended home space caused by this sense of dislocation and placelessness that encapsulates a great number of migrant experiences. Doreen Massey, in her commentary about the nature of place in contemporary times, reflects on the increasing mobility and dispersion of this era and the uncertainty it brings:

> How, in the face of all this movement and intermixing, can we retain a sense of local place and its particularity? An (idealized) notion of an era when places were (supposedly) inhabited by coherent and homogenous communities is set against the current fragmentation and disruption … 'place' and 'community' have only rarely been conterminous. But the occasional longing for such coherence is none the less a sign of geographical fragmentation, the spatial disruption of our times … One of the effects of such responses is that place itself, the seeking after a sense of place, has come to be seen by some as necessarily reactionary. (146-47)

The constant movement and migration that have characterised the past century have resulted in the fragmentation of identities and of geographies and increased the sense of territoriality between different groups. The territoriality of past Chinese settlements (predating the 'Chinatown' construct) demonstrates the efforts of Chinese immigrants to claim a space for themselves. The extension of the lifestyle and practices of the homeland are then transplanted onto the cultural landscapes of the host country.

The rhetoric on Chinatown as a cultural space is also framed around the theme of disappointed hope. Kevin Lai and Matt Hyunh's "ABC Supermarket" illustrates this subject of how the dream of success is often elusive. As one of only two comic illustrations included

in the anthology, "ABC Supermarket" tells of a family's venture into the supermarket business in Cabramatta, an area now known today as either 'Little Saigon', 'Little Asia', or 'Chinatown'. At the beginning of the text, the supermarket is a well-accepted venture. But what is initially a successful business opportunity subsequently and gradually falls into destitution because of new town planning and the development in the area. With the gradual loss of customers and income, the family is forced to close down their supermarket business and move away from Cabramatta.

In the graphic narrative, the narrator's parents dream of a better life for the family and a better future for their children. In order to pursue this dream of a better future, they have invested all their hopes, dreams and resources into the supermarket. For the narrator, the supermarket was a fun place to be in and it was a space that was imprinted within memories of childhood. In the time the family spent there, they developed a sense of topophilia for it. The devastating loss of the family business altered every aspect of their livelihoods and forced each of them to confront a different future from that which they have envisioned for themselves. Disappointed hope, which is a theme within the master narrative, is made even more present with the allusion to a particularly successful Asian Australian venture, Bing Lee, a chain of successful electronics shops that is a relatively well-known and established business in New South Wales. This failure and success paradigm demonstrates the interplay between spatiality and identity, because the supermarket is seen as a site through which the family tries to claim a space as their own. Successfully claiming a space through economic and financial means would establish a sort of stake within the Australian socio-cultural landscape. The family's failure to do so also transforms how the area is perceived. The disappointment and heartbreak of losing the supermarket is a traumatising episode for the whole family. For the family, especially the children, the experience of losing such a beloved place has been difficult. Years, after, the area where the supermarket once stood, becomes a constant reminder of a happier past and of their failure. The association of

unhappy emotions with the site of the former surpermarket points to how the space has been transformed from a topophilic space into a topophobic one.

And yet, the trope of difference within narratives of Chinatown in the anthology is also highlighted by capitalising on and inverting the idea of Chinatown as an extension of China. Instead, Chinatown can be the primary reference point to cultural inclusion. Michelle Law's brief reference to Chinatown in "A Call to Arms" illustrates this inversion when on a trip to Hong Kong. After arriving in Hong Kong and taking in the view of the cityscape, the narrator cannot help but realise that Hong Kong is like 'an extended Chinatown' (*GUAIA* 244). Within this space of Hong Kong as an extended Chinatown, the narrator's physical appearance, which often troubles her because of its marked Asianness, offers her an opportunity to experience being a member of the majority. In Hong Kong, she is no longer different and othered. There, she is happy to finally become 'invisible' (*GUAIA* 244) if only for a brief moment. In a way, the experience of Law's protagonist mirrors that of Choi's narrative about the grandfather. In Chinatown, the grandfather no longer becomes the 'Other', and instead he becomes part of the community where his 'difference' is minimised. On a larger scale, for Law's protagonist Hong Kong is essentially similar to Chinatown in that they function the same way; they both provide an important space for Asian Australians.

Sites of Belonging, Unboundedness, and Anxieties: Hybrid Identities and Ethnic Consciousness

A number of narratives in the anthology can also be examined within the framework of cultural hybridity. Here, Chinatown and ethnic business spaces are used as tropes in the articulation of hybridity and consciousness of one's ethnicity, and operate as a resistance to neat and bounded notions of identity. The fragmentation and instability of hybrid consciousness within the narratives are foregrounded by the ways in which Chinatown is represented. They demonstrate how the boundaries of Chinatown are in fact unbounded, permeable, and elastic. This notion of permeable boundaries is not unique to Chinatown, ethnic businesses or even urban sites. In fact, it highlights the very nature of the relationship

between place and identity. This aspect of the relationship between place and identity reveals how fragmented and unstable places act as containers and sources of identity (de)construction and maintenance. Gillian Rose argues that:

> Increasing flows of ideas, commodities, information and people are constantly challenging sense of place and identity which perceive themselves as stable and fixed. The increasing interdependence between places means that, for many academics at least, places must be seen as having permeable boundaries across which things are always moving. Identities, too, more and more often involve experiences of migration and cultural changing and mixing. (116)

In this sense, the construction of Chinatown in the past had provided physical and symbolic boundaries for both white Australia and the Chinese, where it was easy to identify and classify those who 'belonged' to the area as opposed to those who did not. This relationship placed emphasis on the binary between Insider–Outsider and Us–Other. This is one of the two ways in which Stuart Hall believes we ascribe culture to a particular site. Yet, he reminds us that 'the ways in which culture, place and identity are imagined and conceptualized are increasingly untenable in the light of the historical and contemporary evidence' (Hall 186). Contemporary forces such as increased migration, enhanced telecommunications, and globalisation might have reduced the limitation and exclusivity of identity to a particular location, but at the same time, they increase the open-endedness of place and identity. Therefore, the symbolic boundaries that maintained the spatial parameters between cultural differences have now broken down and spill over into different spaces. Chinatown's borders are not only porous, but they are also elastic and span a vast network which includes small business enterprises. In a sense, small ethnic business spaces, whether independent or within a cluster, are seen as mini-Chinatowns or satellite Chinatowns, with

each performing or taking on a function of Chinatown. The unboundedness and hybridity of such places reflect the same idea of unbounded or hybrid identities.

Narratives of those who are Australian-born, bi-racial, or have undergone extensive acculturation from childhood demonstrate this view of hybrid identities. Vanessa Woods's "Perfect Chinese Children" is about Woods's reimagining of her mother's struggle to raise her bi-racial children within the nexus of their two cultural heritages. The mother is confronted with stigma and prejudice from members of the Chinese community because of her decision to marry and subsequently divorce a *gweilo*, a derogatory term in Cantonese meaning 'ghost person' for foreigners, especially from Western countries. In a sense, by her life choices, the narrator's mother has inadvertently placed herself within a hybrid space: 'In our world, interracial marriages are unheard of. We don't know any other Chinese who married Australians' (*GUAIA* 105). In doing so, the narrator demonstrates the challenges, prejudice, and confusion faced by those who inhabit these hybrid spaces and this account inadvertently dismantles the untenable notion of fixed and stable notions of self.

Cultural hybridity is not only about the reconstitution of two or more cultural zones, but also about the construction of new projections of identity. Undeniably, people have an inclination to an absolutist view of other people and the world. This habit endures despite the often complicated implications and repercussions that such simplistic classifications bring forth. People who inhabit these spaces, therefore, are living testaments that different types of consciousness are not easily confined into singular and organised entities. They also challenge and destabilise established notions of cultural identities. Homi Bhabha in his book, *The Location of Culture* (1991), explains that the notion of the 'third space' characterises the idea of hybridity (55). This space allows alternative subject positions to develop and displace deeply rooted traditional historical narratives and at the same time, construct new socio-cultural or political enterprises and subjectivities.

In Woods's story, the mother's status as a single parent within an ethnic minority community during the time of her childhood meant that the small family faced many difficulties, such as financial instability. (In East and Southeast Asian communities, divorce and single-parenthood are still considered as taboo.) Within the frame of Woods's narrative, there is no obvious or lengthy description of Chinatown or ethnic businesses save for a mention of Saturday visits to a yum cha restaurant. This seemingly inconspicuous mention of a restaurant serving the popular Chinese dish resonates with not only the bi-racial and bi-cultural aspects of the children's identity, but also the stigma faced by single mothers in ethnic minority communities. It is a site that displays the anxiety that bi-racial children or children who have grown up within two cultures experience on a daily basis.

The Saturday visits to the yum cha restaurant with the other 'aunties', who are her mother's relatives and friends, demonstrate how the children go through processes of cultural negotiation through habitual experiences. Already under pressure for not conforming to the expectations and standards 'set' by the mother's elders and relatives, the yum cha restaurant is a setting for a public display of the narrator's failures and the family's financial crisis, and also reflects the pressures the mother and her children experiences:

> Every Saturday, about twenty of our 'inner circle' go to yum cha. The
> children are fed *cha siu bao* pork buns to fill us up so we don't eat any of the
> expensive stuff, while the grown-ups brag about themselves by bragging
> about their children … And my poor mother sits with nothing to say. No
> awards we have won. No praise from our teachers. No marks high enough
> for medical or law school. It is the ultimate aspiration for any Chinese
> mother to have a child who is a lawyer or a doctor. The best scenario
> would be a lawyer who defends doctors in court.
>
> …

'Mum,' I tug on my mother's arm during Saturday yum cha as she chews

on a prawn dumpling, part of yet another meal she can't pay for.

…

The eating habits of my sister and I are yet another source of

embarrassment. We are very wasteful. We don't eat chicken's feet. We

don't such the jelly out of the fish eyeballs and we refuse to eat the creamy

filling inside prawn heads. (*GUAIA* 107-9)

From the passage above, the space provided for the boundaries of the yum cha restaurant becomes symbolic for two reasons. Firstly, it is a space that magnifies the mother's disgrace in the eyes of her cultural and social circles. Secondly, it is a site that magnifies the cultural differences that mark Woods and her sister, and which go beyond the confines of physical appearance. Cultural expectations, such as academic successes and the adherence to cultural mores, seem an important aspect of trying to project a primordial sense of 'Chineseness.' Woods points out, however, that her and her brother's trajectory is different:

As time goes by it becomes clear to her that we are going the way of

Australian children. The ones who don't work as hard, are loud and

uncouth and, worst of all, talk back to their parents and hold their

chopsticks near the pointed ends, like peasants. (*GUAIA* 105)

The hybrid space in the text provides an avenue to discuss the anxieties surrounding identity, particularly being bi-racial, in Woods's account. Caught between two starkly contrasting cultures, she perceives hybridity as undesirable. The subtle hostility towards this mix of two cultures results in anxiety for bi-racial and bi-cultural individuals. Behind this seemingly simple state of being 'Australian,' there is also a sense of a double rejection where the narrator is rejected by members of both cultural communities. The narrator's attempts

to come to terms with her 'whiteness' at home is impeded by her having to confront her 'Chineseness' in school as well:

> There's a rhyme going around the playground. The kids pull up the corners of their eyes, then pull them down, chanting: 'Chinese, Japanese, hope your kids turn Pickanese.' On Pickanese, they lift one eye up and one eye down, giving the clear impression of mental retardation. (*GUAIA* 106)

This conflict may contribute to the development of a sense of ambivalence towards identity and cultural heritage. Her mother and some of the older members of the inner circle perceive the narrator to be 'polluted' and essentially 'white' because of the 'impure blood' (105) of her white Australian father. Woods's story, placed between primordial constructions of 'whiteness' and 'Chineseness,' characterises a developing third consciousness which is more open to change and difference. Rose believes that people who develop hybrid consciousness, 'transgress and displace boundaries between divisions and in so doing produce something ontologically new' (Rose 364). This movement of people of hybrid consciousness, Rose continues, makes 'certain binary divisions harder to sustain' (Rose 364).

This anxiety towards being culturally different can also be exhibited in a more reactive manner by those who are conscious of how different they are from members of the majority. In "Hot and Spicy," Oliver Phommavanh reveals that his family's Thai food business offers him the experience to learn and to understand that being different is something that should be appreciated and celebrated; he comes to appreciate his position of being of Thai heritage and being Australian. At home, which is located within the restaurant itself, Phommavanh's protagonist lives and breathes Thai food. The narrator explains how he hates eating Thai food and that he is 'sick of Thai food' because he is 'tired of having the same stuff all the time' (*GUAIA* 82) as a child, and instead develops a great love for the Australian food served at school. 'The canteen,' he comments, 'is the best thing about school. It's got meat pies, sausage rolls and chicken burgers' (*GUAIA* 82). He then recalls a

multicultural food feast organised by his school to celebrate diversity and is anguished and ashamed by having to bring Thai food to share with his teachers and schoolmates. To make matters worse, his teacher has specifically requested some Thai food from his parents' restaurant. This initial rejection or aversion to Thai food, as an extension of Thai culture, again demonstrates the ambivalence, anxiety, and at times, shame of people who are positioned within different cultures.

The changing of how the food tastes, such as the level of spiciness, also accentuates the idea of a developing space between two divisions. The Thai foods that the teachers at the school have ordered are all normal fare and in deference to their tolerance level, the teachers having requested that the food be mild in its spiciness. The parents, therefore, believe that they would have to cook a slightly modified version of their food:

'We need to cook Aussie Thai for your teachers.'

I almost choked on my fork. 'Aussie Thai? Is that like putting satay sauce
on steak?

Mum shakes her head. 'We cook differently for people who don't have
Thai often. Even if your teachers didn't request mild food, we would still
take it easy on the chilli.'

Dad comes in and gives me another glass of water. 'I always laugh at the
Thai-style sausages and chicken sticks in the supermarket. There's hardly
any flavour in them.'

…

Jennie puts down her bowl. Her sweet and sour pork is neon pink. My
mum's Chinese friends cook sweet and sour pork but it doesn't look like it
would glow in the dark. 'The pork looks so bright,' I finally say.

Jennie grins. 'Yeah. My mum made it Aussie style.' I smiled back. (*GUAIA*

85-6)

Here, Phommanvanh demonstrates how Asian food is made to accommodate local

tastebuds and, at the same time, this practice highlights the power of food as cultural currency.

To a certain extent, the practice of modifying food to accommodate and to attract people of

different cultures inhabits a unique space. It is the same with promoting one type of food to

encourage more people to eat, as mentioned in Emily J. Sun's "These are the Photographs

We Take," where Lita, a friend of the narrator mentions, 'The deep fried dishes are just a

gimmick to get white people into the restaurants. No Chinese person who knows anything

about food would eat the fried stuff' (*GUAIA* 310). These impressions, on the surface, seem

to intensify the antagonism between the two cultures, but at the same time, they reflect the

constant ongoing negotiation that catapults the creation of a cross-cultural third state of

consciousness.

Nevertheless, visits to spaces such as restaurants would also stimulate a sense of

nostalgia within individuals who seek symbolic spaces that are difficult to grasp or recover.

The opening scenes of Tony Ayres's story, "Silence," recall the writer's visit to a little Chinese

cafe with his white partner. Upon seeing the cafe, he is hit with a sense of nostalgia:

We passed a little Chinese café where a few people sat mournfully over

bowls of steaming noodles. My first ten years in Australia were spent in the

backs of places like these, and a rush of sentimentality prompted me to

stop.

'Let's eat here.'

Robert looked dubiously at the filthy laminex tables, the plastic Hong

Kong lanterns, the window display of headless and roasted red ducks hung

on coat-hanger wires. How many times in the many years we'd been

together had I insisted on eating at places like this, hoping to rediscover

some elusive memory of childhood? (*GUAIA* 235)

Ayres's detailed description of the interior of the café betrays a deep longing to recover that obscure cultural space that he has lost over the years when he consciously removed himself from it. In this scheme of things place, Ayres wishes to revisit a part of his identity he has long let go of. His representation of the cafe is perhaps one of the most in-depth and vivid descriptions of a particular space within the whole anthology, evoking in the reader many sense impressions. This attention to detail highlights the fact that what transpires within the cafe is something that resonates with his sense of self and his identity. While in the space of the cafe with his partner, he is acutely conscious of how his Australian mannerisms betray his Asian features and it is something that he wishes to hide from the other Asians in the cafe. Feeling uncomfortable and self-conscious, he comments to the girl serving them:

'We'd like to order. Something fast, we're going to the movies,' I said in

precise Australian-accented English. I always made a point of speaking first

in a Chinese restaurant, to avoid the embarrassment of having to explain

that I didn't speak Chinese. (*GUAIA* 235)

This theme of not being able to speak Chinese is similar to the angst about language in Choi's and Woods's narratives, and shows what is perceived as failure at ensuring the cultural continuity for which many minority communities in Australia strive. Ayres recognises that with the loss of the Chinese language, he can be quickly marked as an 'Other' when he is within a particular cultural space. Again, this shows that alienation and alterity brought upon by language loss goes both ways. This nostalgia and attempt to grasp something of a lost past is a recurring feature of much migrant literature. Ayres's text examines the memory and emotional attachment, and the overall likelihood of a return to that particular

space. His story is of a man who encounters a tangible boundary that separates two different worlds, two different paths.

Referring back to the unboundedness of Chinatown and ethnic business spaces, Ayres's portrayal supports the view that, as a settlement, Chinatowns afford a process that helps migrants to slowly integrate and assimilate with their host society. Zhou, in the study of migrant Chinese communities in the United States, argues that immigrant Chinese are able to capitalise on the social capital and networking within Chinatown and by working with Chinese business owners (Zhou 1992). By drawing upon these resources, Zhou comments, they are able to slowly overcome social barriers and contribute to the mobility of the socio-economy of the community. This is a criticism of what many perceive to be the nature of ethnic enclaves, whereby migrants are seen as defiant and resistant to the processes of integration and assimilation Yet, Chinatowns and ethnic business spaces are increasingly undergoing reconstitution to support such activities so that newer migrants can have the space to adjust to a different environment.

In Ayres's story, the ensuing encounter with a group of homophobic and racist men, whom Ayres' unintentionally provokes with a 'flying kiss,' and his subsequent rescue by the young waitress, highlights the gap that exists between two cultures, as Ayres notes:

> I realised that what lay between the waitress and me was the silence that is
>
> the gap between two cultures. It is neither misunderstanding nor hostility,
>
> just the empty noise of two frequencies out of alignment. Perhaps it is
>
> possible to be attuned to both, but it was my fate to cross a threshold from
>
> one culture and class into another. Once that is done, there is no going
>
> back. That other world becomes a series of imaginary conjectures and
>
> 'what ifs,' a land you can only see if your close your eyes and squint.
>
> (*GUAIA* 238)

This inescapable fantasy and the possibilities of different potential outcomes echo Tseng's text. The spatial and aesthetic descriptions of the cafe, coupled with the people and the human activity that take place there, position Ayres as someone who is now 'looking into' that life, which has become foreign to him in so many ways. He is now the Other and the Outsider. In a sense, the Chinese restaurants evoke a shadow of ethnic consciousness in Ayres, and yet he has acknowledged that for him at least, the unboundedness and porosity afforded by these spaces are no longer accessible for someone like him. He has left the boundaries of the space and has completely assimilated into mainstream society for too long. He can only revisit the space as a stranger or as an outsider. Reconciling his ethnic identity with the identity he has created for himself is an impossible task. For others who are more fortunate, that silence that he encountered could be transformed into a viable space that enables the subject to negotiate and manoeuvre between the two cultures.

Ethnic consciousness, which is a noted theme within Ayres's narrative, is also present in the other texts within the anthology. Within the discussion of hybridity, the idea of ethnic consciousness is positioned as a gateway to construct Bhabha's third space of enunciation. I argue that this is true for individuals who have, by numerous circumstances, separated or been positioned away from their cultural heritage. Chinatowns and ethnic business spaces, then, function as cultural resources and repositories for these individuals who are keen to (re)discover a part of their history and heritage or who wish to reconstruct, recover or renegotiate a unique sense of cultural identity.

Blossom Beeby's "The Face in the Mirror" best exemplifies the theme of dislocation and the process of finding one's heritage within the borders of Chinatown. Her narrative is one of the experience of being a Korean child adopted into a white Australian family. Having been raised in a white Australian home and culture, the narrator explains how adopted Korean babies were raised during the 1980s:

Parents who acquired 'Made in Korea' babies in the 1980s received scant

care instructions. Don't treat delicately. Allow to integrate. Take special

care not to acknowledge Asian-ness. My parents headed the tag, I think.

Asian adoptees often talk about their experiences with mirrors. To many

of us they have a sad significance. Inside we identified with the Caucasian

people who made up our families. If we closed our eyes and imagined

ourselves, we would see rosy white kids. When we looked at our faces in

the mirror, though, foreigners would appear. I internalised my Asian face,

but it didn't mean that I liked it. I just accepted it. (*GUAIA* 324)

As a result of this internalisation, the narrator began to distance herself from any identifiable Asianness in mannerism. Her physical appearance, however, is something that cannot be easily altered. Her perception and views on a number of subjects, including notions of beauty, were very much in tune with the views of the general white Australian population at the time. Within the presence of other Asians or when confronted by Asian culture, she feels a sense of fear and anxiety, possibly because Asians and Asian cultures would, in one way or another, reveal her guise. Despite her white consciousness however, she acknowledges that there were times when her guise did not work as effectively as she would have liked. Simply put, she felt physically out of place with white Australians and culturally dislocated with her Asian cultural heritage. This disconnection from both cultures points to the sense of ambivalence noted by many scholars and puts her within a separate space that can be called a sense of 'in-betweenness'.

However, with the advent of her teenage years came more openness to embracing her Asianness and also trying out other identities. The narrator derived a sense of belonging and comfort from visits to nightclubs with a very multicultural demographic and from being surrounded by people of many ethnicities, including Asians:

> I felt at ease asserting my ethnicity among the throngs of other black-
>
> haired people who gathered in those dark, smoky venues. It was the first
>
> time I felt comfortable being an Asian, around other Asians. (*GUAIA* 325)

Despite coming to terms with her Korean heritage, however, the narrator acknowledges that she knows next to nothing about the culture. With the encouragement of her Japanese–American boyfriend, another individual with a hyphenated identity who to some degree understands her predicament, she decides to take the first step in locating her cultural heritage by sampling some Korean food in Chinatown. The Korean food stall located in Adelaide's Chinatown offers her the means to awaken her senses and glimpse into her personal history. Eating Korean food helps her to discover and claim this part of her cultural history. This process gradually leads to other discoveries through language, reading, and eventually, a physical trip back to the land of her birth. While learning the Korean language and characters, Beeby would use Korean or Hangul signs in Chinatown to strengthen her linguistic skills:

> To me, written Korean looked like someone had thrown down sticks and
>
> circles on a page. But I learned quickly and was soon able to make out the
>
> sounds they represented. I returned to Chinatown one weekend and stared
>
> at the sticks and circles … (*GUAIA* 326)

Transculturally adopted children, such as Beeby, go through a diverse range of experiences, such as separation, loss, and racism (Harris 2006). With Beeby's testimony, the conscious effort to reclaim her Korean heritage encourages the development of her 'Asian' consciousness and, at the same time, the construction of another separate consciousness that binds the two halves together. The Korean food stall, the grocery, the Korean signage, and 'Chinatown' as a whole, have given her passage into an unknown world. At the same time, these avenues help emphasise how unbounded the nature of these spaces are. By the end of

her testimony, Beeby explains that the Korean aspect of her identities is still a work in progress, and she comments:

> It has taken some time for the different bits of me to fit comfortably, and
>
> I am sure they will continue to realign and I will continue to question. For
>
> now, I think questioning is good. It seems to make things clearer. (*GUAIA*
>
> 329)

Conclusion

The writers who contributed their narratives and testimonies in *Growing Up Asian in Australia* have, in one way or another, addressed the many issues surrounding their personal memories, such as ideas of belonging and multiplicity of identity, all within the paradigm of Chinatown and ethnic business spaces. The representations of these connected spaces differ in terms of scale, length, detail, and even function. Through their narratives, they manage to demonstrate that being Asian is not a singular state of being or mind. Within the boundaries of the spaces there are different voices, experiences, and subjectivities. The Chinatowns and ethnic business spaces represented within this anthology reject a sense of absolutism through the emotional and symbolic depth of their association with place.

Just as Agheare, in Pung's memoirs, traces the trajectory of her identity though the houses she inhabits, the contributors to the anthology attempt to reconcile different notions of themselves through their childhood memories, all grounded by a symbolic attachment to Chinatown and ethnic business spaces. In different ways, these stories all dislodge traditional notions of Asianness by playing with issues of inclusion/exclusion and otherness as something that can be mapped through the spaces of Chinatown.

The Chinatowns represented in the anthology reflect the confluence of both cultural continuity and diversity for members of the first generation and also younger Asian Australians. With acts that contribute to cultural continuity in Australia, Chinatowns can also be a source of comfort and familiarity for those who yearn for a sense of 'home'. The acute

sense of alienation and loneliness that result from migration and being displaced is remedied through the cultural and social support provided by Chinatown.

The image of Chinatown that is seen in today's popular media belies the diversity of experiences that are confined within its boundaries. The sense of place and spatiality in the following chapter, however, will magnify notions of identity that are portrayed by Asian Australian writers through representations of the Australian suburb.

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Chapter Four

Suburban Reality and Myth in Simone Lazaroo's *The World Waiting to be Made* (1994) and *Siew Siang Tay's Handpicked* (2004)

</div>

Introduction

'This is the cream brick frontier. It is not only a frontier of bricks and mortar but a mental frontier as well.' – (Davidson, Dingle, and O'Hanlon 2)

Following the discussion on Chinatown as a permeable cultural space, this chapter is an examination of the suburban environment in two novels written by migrant women writers. Suburbia, along with imagery of the Australian bush and the Gallipoli campaign, is one of the most ubiquitous images associated with the notion of a 'definitive' Australian identity. It remains a recurring motif within the national narrative and imaginary, with reincarnations of suburban life (including its myths and stereotypes) being widely appropriated in popular culture and media. This chapter locates itself within the fictional, material, and symbolic landscapes of Australian suburbia and examines Simone Lazaroo's *The World Waiting to be Made* (1994) and Siew Siang Tay's *Handpicked* (2004). In each text, I will consider how Australian suburbia becomes a psychologically entrapping trope for the migrant women protagonists. As part of this theme, I will also focus on the experiences of the two female protagonists in a primarily gendered, classed, and raced cultural space, highlighted through the ideas of suburban reality and fantasy.

Representations of suburbia in the two texts reflect the tension between fantasy and reality, where suburban ideology can be both a trigger of self-discovery and potential, and an entrapping trope. In *The World Waiting to be Made*, Lazaroo presents the unfolding of a life narrative of a young Eurasian girl who settles with her family in 1960s suburban Perth. The young and unnamed narrator, who migrated to Australia early in her childhood, highlights how suburbia, perceived as a site of new beginnings, can be an entrapping site of experience.

Her narrative also highlights the allegorical nature of suburbia as being literally 'in-between' cultures, as she is confronted with the social repercussions of being different. In the second text, Tay's *Handpicked*, Laila, an Ibanese Malaysian, soon discovers that her dream of living a suburban life with a South Australian man she has met through letters is founded upon a lie. Her gamble to abandon her family and her life in Malaysia to marry Jim does not pay off. She slowly becomes physically, emotionally and psychologically trapped, not only within the confines of Jim's small caravan, but equally within the fantasy of suburban living that she believes will liberate her from the miasma of poverty in which she has been living her entire life. Her plans to pursue this suburban fantasy gradually morph into an obsession, which is obstructed by the reality of limited opportunity and confrontations with the culture of misogyny in Australia. Laila's story highlights the often demonised figure of the Asian mail-order bride, and her often ignored suffering.

The texts reveal the complex nature of suburbia as a geographical site, a cultural practice, and a state of mind. This chapter argues that the texts challenge the idea of suburban life as a repository for a cultural fantasy of what constitutes a good life and encapsulate an idea of what it means to 'be' Australian. The texts also posit the idea of suburbia as a site of alienation for these female protagonists. In arguing this, I begin by tracing the development of the Australian suburban culture and how contemporary suburbia is gradually being transformed by a new cultural wave.

Australian Suburbs in Context: How they Came to Be and What they (used to) Represent

Much like the other cultural sites I have discussed, it is highly problematic to identify a concrete and unanimous definition of 'suburb' and 'suburbia'. However Healy, McAuliffe, and Feber. suggest a distinction: the 'suburb' is a physical place, while suburbia is more of a psychological state. They also identify suburbia as an imagined space where 'a vast array of fears, desires, insecurities, obsessions, and yearning have been projected and displaced'

(Healy, McAuliffe, and Feber xiii). Interestingly, they suggest that suburbia is not to be found in an exact geographical location. Instead, they believe:

> Suburbia has been a way to identify traces which are not, and perhaps never were, really present. Thus suburbia has been a way of talking about other things; about change, family, community, childhood, and the tenuous habits we sometimes imagine as tradition. Suburbia names an imagined place which can hold together and enunciate a sometimes attenuated sense of self in the world. (xviii)

Similarly, Andrew McCann sees Australian suburbia as 'an extremely unstable collection of tropes, representational conventions and stereotypes that can't be read in conventional terms' ("Introduction: Subtopia, or the Problem of Suburbia" viii). It is this capacity to express a sense of projected self that has pushed the suburban imagery into becoming an indelible part of contemporary popular culture (Rupa Huq 2013). Popular culture appropriates what is deemed as suburban culture, and in turn, people perpetuate the image in their own lives.

In effect, suburbia has achieved the status of national symbol, as exemplified by a recent exhibit of national symbols curated by the National Museum of Australia. Yet, nowhere is suburbia's significance made more apparent than in its numerous re-creations in Australian popular culture and media. Sue Turnbull's critical commentary on the association between Australian comedy and suburban culture exemplifies this relationship. She comments that while the iconic figures of the bushman and the ocker are favourite images that continue to endure the test of time, ideas of a 'real' Australia reside within the suburbs (Turnbull 15). She traces this by studying comedies and characters set in suburban environments, such as the comedic figure of the outrageous Dame Edna Everage. Dame Edna is arguably the most recognised suburban icon in the country.

Although immensely popular with generations of Australian audiences, Humphries's Edna can also be perceived as a form of anti-suburbia criticism. Edna can be taken to personify the hypocrisy, conformity, and uniformity of suburbanites, a point which will be discussed in further depth later in the discussion. Australia's enduring fascination with suburban culture, however, continues to be seen through its popularity in mass culture. Humphries' revival of Dame Edna in 2013, and the popularity of Australian soaps such as *Neighbours*, *Home and Away*, and more recently, *House Husbands*, demonstrate the embeddedness of suburbia in the Australian popular consciousness — one that has its roots set in the histories of how Australia came to be suburbanised within a relatively short period of time. This popularity of the Australian suburban myth today is the result of the change and growth that took place within two developmental phases spanning two different historical periods.

The Development of the Australian Suburbs

The first period of Australian suburban development began during the nineteenth century when Australia was still a series of British colonies. As arguably one of the most suburbanised nations in the world today (Davison 41), the history of the rapid expansion of suburban areas in Australia was founded upon what is termed a logic of avoidance (G. Davidson 64). This logic of avoidance is associated with Australia's colonial origins. Although it had a reputation of being a penal colony, this 'southern land' was also viewed as a place to escape to a place of refuge for people from different socio-cultural groups. There were also practical reasons for urban planning in the colonies. The overpopulation within cities in Britain, which overburdened existing infrastructures and sanitation systems was believed to have resulted in the poor quality of city life and the spread of serious diseases (G. Davidson 64).

In Australia, where there is space in abundance, colonial governments applied urban-planning blueprints. Residential units allocated enough space for sanitary conditions, were a

precursor to the detached one-storey house built on a quarter-acre of land closely associated with suburbia (Healy et. al 1994). This utilisation of space contributed to improved sanitation and hygiene, helping colonial governments to reduce the incidence of major health scares, which frequently plagued city dwellers who lived in dense and confined urban residential areas (G. Davidson 64). However, early Australian suburbia had its setbacks, prompting *The Royal Commission on the Housing of the People of the Metropolis* (1917) to issue a statement on appropriate housing practices, demonstrating the evolution of the sanitised suburban space:

> In general view, it is regarded as insanitary, and otherwise undesirable practice, for two or more families to occupy at the same time a dwelling house of ordinary design and size, when evils due to overcrowding are to be looked for. So it is agreed among sanitarians that similar evils, on a large scale, are to be expected where dwellings are built on allotments having dimensions so limited as to leave insufficient space… (Parliament of Victoria 25-6)

The post-war period marks the second phase of suburban development in Australia. Here were the beginnings of the Great Australian Dream, a phenomenon comparable to the American Dream. Australia's geopolitical relationships also underwent significant change during this period with a shift towards alignment with America as the new global power, overtaking Britain. At the same time, after the war's end, Australia was also preparing itself for a more diverse population after the war. With the return of servicemen from the wars, the subsequent baby boom, and the influx of new migrants from Europe and later, Asia, Australia was confronted with the problem of limited housing for a rapidly increasing population.

More importantly, the Great Australian Dream placed an even greater emphasis on notions of home, nation, and security within the Australian narrative. This phenomenon grew out of the aspiration for a better life and the attainment of success and security,

primarily through financial independence, which was equated with the idea of home ownership. To own a house and garden on a quarter-acre block became the dream and aspiration for many Australians. Former Australian Prime Minister, Sir Robert Gordon Menzies in his speech "Forgotten Peoples" (1942), commented:

> The material home represents the concrete expression of the habits of
>
> frugality and saving ... one of the best instincts in us is that which induces
>
> us to have one little piece of earth with a house and a garden which is ours;
>
> to which we can withdraw, in which we can be among friends, into which
>
> no stranger may come against our will. (qtd. in Judith Brett 73)

Menzies's statement extends beyond a simple encouragement for Australians to start investing in real estate. Not only did Menzies venerate the notion of home, but he also made the association between home ownership and patriotism. Within this logic was the belief that home ownership had the power to inculcate patriotism in Australians and that people who owned homes were more likely to defend the nation against intruders (Brett 73).

The Great Australian Dream, however, was not founded only upon ideas of home ownership and financial independence. In pursuit of this ideal, people were also expected to embrace a certain kind of lifestyle (Balint and Kalman 8). It was a type of lifestyle that was privileged by a set of customs and rituals that were both tacit and restrictive. The dream of living in a bricked house with a garden surrounded by a white picket fence sustained the notion that the suburb was a favourable and respectable space for producing an accepted version of Australian identity.

Anti-Suburban Commentary

Despite the enduring power of a suburban fantasy, the idea of suburbia has attracted considerable backlash from intellectuals, artists and writers. Critical commentary on the suburb as dull, isolating, and entrapping undermines the image of the suburb as the Great Australian Dream. In 1912, Louis Esson, a playwright noted for his socialist standing,

attacked the dullness of suburban life. 'The suburban home,' he argues, 'must be destroyed. It stands for all that is dull and cowardly and depressing in modern life' (73). For Esson and many socialists, suburbia went against socialist ideals by dampening the predisposition to rebel through concepts of private ownership and mortgage.

Esson's argument against suburban dullness echoed well into the 1960s, when suburban development was arguably at its height. During this era, most anti-suburbia criticism called out against the domestic, conformist, and monotonous nature of suburbia. Allan Ashbolt provides an acerbic critique of the suburban man and suburbia. He comments:

> Behold the man — the Australian man of today — on Sunday mornings in
>
> the suburbs, when the high decibel drone of the motor-mower is calling
>
> the faithful to worship. A block of land, a brick veneer, and the motor-
>
> mower beside him in the wilderness — what more does he want to sustain,
>
> except a Holden to polish, a beer with the boys, marital sex on Sunday
>
> nights, a few furtive adulteries, an occasional gamble on the horses or the
>
> lottery, the tribal rituals of football, the flickering shadows in the lounge-
>
> room of cops and robbers, goodies and baddies, guys and dolls? (373)

Suburbia, argues Andrew McCann, highlights the pervasive anxiety that gripped Australian culture and intellectualism during the post-war period (McCann vii). In post-war writing, in particular, McCann notes that the anxieties associated with suburban life were expressed through narratives focused on city life, the socio-political implications of suburban culture, and the everyday life experiences. On this point, he notes:

> The reorganisation of suburbia as a site of consumption, domestic hygiene,
>
> rationalism and notion of identity formation in the post-war period speaks
>
> to the historical transformation in which the 'everyday' itself becomes
>
> viable as an object of cognition and in which suburbia, as an embodiment

of this 'everyday' experience, also solicits fantasies of escape and flight.

(vii)

Suburbia is viewed as a space that promotes ideas of conformity, false respectability and the acculturation of nature. Many intellectuals and writers, however, believed that these ideas of suburbia went against the creative spirit and enthusiasm of being Australian. As an articulation of this negativity surrounding suburban culture, literary critics and writers, particularly novelists, have given little attention to suburbia as a subject of examination. In his book, *Exploring Suburbia: The Suburbs in the Contemporary Australian Novel* (2012), Nathaniel O'Reilly argues that 'for most of Australian history, novelists and literary critics have deemed suburban life an unworthy subject' (xii). Yet, this perceived conformity and dullness of suburban culture can itself be a myth. This tension reflects the gap between idealisation of suburbia and its reality.

Despite this tendency of Australian novelists to shy away from the subject because of its reputation as a cultural desert, O'Reilly credits a number of contemporary writers who have examined the idea of Australian suburbia in their writing, including Australian writers of Asian-descent such as Lillian Ng and Shaun Tan. In fact, Asian Australian writers are increasingly engaging with the idea of suburbia as an allegorical means of tracing complexities of identity. Writers such as Alice Pung, Hsu-Ming Teo, Benjamin Law and the two writers whose texts are examined in this chapter, Simone Lazaroo and Siew Siang Tay, are some of the emerging Australian writers of Asian heritage who join Lillian Ng and Shaun Tan in engaging notions of suburbia through different eyes. This is an interesting and noteworthy development because discussions of the Australian suburban culture so far have been limited to specific classed, raced, and gendered experiences. Although Asian characters in suburban settings have been present in earlier Australian fiction, they have generally lacked any depth of character and plot development and exist only as two-dimensional caricatures.

Asians and the Australian Suburb

Despite past neglect of this issue in the literary and cultural imagination, the diversification of the Australian suburb has occurred historically through the influx of Asian migrants during the post-war period, particularly the Vietnam War, the Cultural Revolution in China and changes made to previously rigid and discriminatory immigration policies (Ang, *Alter/Asians: Asian–Australian Identities in Art, Media and Popular Culture* xxiv). Together with an increasingly globalised economy, these changes have influenced the current trend of Asian immigration into Australia. The movement of Asians into suburban areas is gradually growing, changing the 'established' dynamics within these spaces. The often permanent migration and settlement of Asians in the suburbs has destabilised the suburban myth of a white, middle-class cultural space. Some of the suburbanites, however, view the prospect of Asian neighbours as something that is undesirable and to be feared. In his book, *All for Australia* (1984), historian Geoffrey Blainey addressed the threat posed by 'Asianisation' to the Australian way of life.

In his effort to justify his anti-Asian sentiment, Blainey comments that Australians living in front-line suburbs complained of their disquiet and discomfort at having Asian neighbours. Citing letters he received by concerned suburbanites, Blainey comments that Asians were impinging on the cultural and economic freedoms of ordinary Australians. Blainey's attack and the subsequent critical aftermath eventually disappeared, only later to reveal itself in the form of future political rhetoric, such as Pauline Hanson's address to parliament in 1996 and the recent anti-Chinese attack by current members of the Senate, Clive Palmer and Jacqui Lambie. These political narratives attacking Asians are similar to Blainey's. Palmer and Lambie present Asians as threatening and suggest that their growing presence will undermine Australian culture and identity (Crowe, "Jacqui Lambie Backs Clive Palmer with Warning of Chinese 'Invasion'").

It seems that even in the 21st century, anti-Asian sentiment is still very much alive and well in Australia, at least within the political game. In an entry entitled, "The Asianisation of Our Suburbs", posted on the Australian Protectionist Party's website, suspicions of the 'yellow peril' are revisited through fears of the changing face of the suburbs. Contextualising the visibility of Chinese culture in Carlton and Kogarah, both New South Wales suburbs, the writer presents his concern for what he believes to be a deliberate attempt by Chinese migrants to supplant Anglo-Australian identity and impose Chinese imperialism:

> In a few more years Kogarah will not be recognizable as an Australian
> town anymore, it will be completely made over into a Chinese suburb and
> Australia Day will be a minor day celebrated by a minority of Anglo-
> Australians. … This is the reality of multiculturalism. Is this the future of
> Australia that we want? Are we going to whinge and complain, but let it all
> happen anyways? (*www.protectionist.net*)

The excerpt above sums up the crux of often-touted arguments against the presence of Asians in Australia. It is based on the threat of the Other to the social, economic and moral well-being of Australians. The writer of this article argues against Asianisation by associating the presence of Asian cultures in these suburbs with the risk of moral decay. In this case, China's reputation for human rights violations is used as a means to foreground the seriousness of the dangers of Asianisation. Similarly, another entry on the website dated 5 March 2011 suggests that Asianisation is a 'story of white genocide'. Such racist commentary highlights the conflict that exists between anti-Asian sentiment and the celebration of Australia's diversity.

Beyond these anxieties, however, Asian migrants have been actively participating and engaging with suburban culture. The *Economist*, in a recent article about migrants in Australia entitled "The Promised Land", shows that Chinese immigrants in Sydney are in the process

of remaking former Anglo-Australian suburbs, buoyed by increasing Chinese trade and investment in Australia:

> Towers of apartments, many owned by Chinese immigrants, now overlook
>
> the Edwardian-era stone and timber bungalows. Shops on the main street
>
> are crammed with Chinese noodles and vegetables, and Mandarin is the
>
> chief language among shoppers. Stacks of Chinese newspapers outnumber
>
> English ones. (43)

The excerpt above foregrounds the growing influence and visibility of Chinese immigrants in Sydney's suburbs. With China's status as Australia's largest trading partner and the introduction of new visa options to ensure further Chinese investment into the local economy, their influence and presence will become increasingly evident in the years to come. More importantly, the transformation that is taking place in Sydney's suburbs demonstrates the growth of ethnoburbs in Australia. 'Ethnoburbs,' argues Wei Li, 'are multiethnic communities in which one ethnic minority group has a significant concentration but does not necessarily constitute a majority' (1). The emergence of this new model of urban landscape can be attributed to a number of causes, including the restructuring of and changes encompassing international geopolitics and economy, immigration, and increasing networks and connections established through transnational movement.

The anti-Asian sentiment within public commentary highlights the significant presence of Asians in the suburbs, whose suburban history can be traced back to at least the 1960s. Because of the perceived opposition between 'Asian' and 'Suburbia', it is useful to examine representations of suburban life in Asian Australian literary production. This chapter will examine two different perspectives on how Asian Australian identity is shaped by the Australian suburban space. Lazaroo's text gives a glimpse of the realities of suburban life for one Eurasian family living in suburbia from the 1960s to the 1980s, and the changes in social attitude towards cultural difference within these two time periods. Siew Siang Tay's text

juxtaposes the idea of suburban reality with a mail-order bride's suburban fantasy. The life of Laila, who comes to Australia from Sarawak, Malaysia, highlights how suburbia is perceived by those not privileged enough to live a suburban lifestyle within its borders. Her narrative is about the aspiration of an 'outsider' to enter the suburban dream and how this aspiration is frustrated by her experience of it. The experiences of Lazaroo's and Siew Siang Tay's female protagonists are different in that one grows up negotiating her 'in-between' identity within an Australian suburb, whereas the other seeks entry into Australian suburban life through migration. However, it is not so much about the differences in their circumstances but what they do with their lived experiences that challenges notions of Australian suburban identity.

Living the Suburban Reality: Exploring 'Eurasian' Within a Racialised and Exoticised Suburban Entrapment in Simone Lazaroo's *The World Waiting to be Made*

In an interview with Paul Giffard-Foret published in *Peril Magazine* in 2008, Simone Lazaroo reveals that part of her motivation to write is the desire to correct the misinformation and misconception people have of Eurasian communities and their cultures. Having moved to Western Australia in her infancy, Lazaroo also uses the art of writing as a platform to 'memorialise and get in touch' (*Peril.com.au*) with her Eurasian roots. Her debut novel, *The World Waiting to be Made* is a reflection of this effort to correct, rediscover and recover.

The novel, which was first published in 1994, has won several awards including the TAG Hungerford Award in 1993 and the Western Australian Premier's Book Award in 1995. It captures the life of a young, Eurasian girl living in a Perth suburban neighbourhood from the 1960s to the 1980s. As a semi-autobiographical *bildungsroman*, the text follows a trajectory of the different stages of self that the narrator negotiates, from her shame of being Asian to her gradual discovery and appreciation of her unique Eurasian heritage, which she finds amidst broken histories. Several core issues including the complexities of culture, racism,

migration, exoticism, and gender roles are explored and played out in the setting of middle-class suburban culture.

In particular, the text presents a picture of the suburban ideal as a bastion of gendered and homogenising forces that seek to subject to an established hegemonic order any forms of difference. Lazaroo addresses this process by illustrating how people react to expressions of difference in the suburbs and the ambivalence of the young and unnamed narrator towards her Asian heritage. As a cultural site, suburbia seems to bring to the foreground the things that demarcate the narrator as 'different' in the face of Whiteness. My examination of the text, therefore, explores this issue by contextualising the implications of suburban culture for a family from a minority culture.

At a time in which Australia was only beginning to shy away from the shadow cast by the White Australia Policy and attempting to embrace a more inclusive multicultural attitude, the novel's temporal setting problematises how the stigma of the Other still prevailed for Asian Australians. Lyn Dickens notes that the multicultural policy was an underlying factor contributing to a sense of tension and ambivalence within narratives such as the one in *The World Waiting to be Made* (2).

From the beginning of the novel, Lazaroo places a great emphasis on the ideas of change and of Australia as a land of opportunity. The phrase, 'the world waiting to be made', is a sustained mantra for the family as they prepare to leave their life in Singapore for a chance at a new life in Australia. This idea of Australia as an empty terrain is accentuated by the image of Singapore as a world that is undergoing intense reshaping and reconfiguration through an 'unprecedented amount of construction work' (Lazaroo 23). Despite the attractiveness of Australia as a site of opportunity, Middle Aunty's comment that Australia is a 'God-forsaken' country, does not only allude to the Otherness of Australia, but also foreshadows the tension of alienation and marginalisation that the family will experience.

The strong presence of suburban life and culture within the text draws the focus to how this tension is expressed and how, for the young narrator, the ability to identify herself as Asian, Eurasian, and Australian is problematised by lingering prejudice. Hence, the examination of this novel will centre upon the relationship between suburban Perth and the in-betweenness of the narrator, her multiple reconfigurations of self, and how the natural landscape is associated with ideas of suburbia and selfhood.

Suburban Allegory and the Motif of In-Betweenness in the Self

The Perth suburban setting in which most of the narrator's story unfolds plays a crucial role in illuminating how notions of difference play out within an established cultural environment. For the young narrator, suburban Perth serves to intensify her ambivalence towards different identities. In her examination of the novel, Tsee-Ling Khoo (1996) comments that the unnamed narrator is an allegorical figure. Khoo explains that Lazaroo's refusal to name the narrator is significant. The ambiguity of the narrator' appearance, which is not easily discernible as Asian but is evidently not Australian, allows other people to superimpose their stereotypes and prejudices onto her. Interestingly, the narrator's obscurity bears an uncanny resemblance to the story of her Indefinitely Great Grandmother, whose hazy past and origins confounded the locals in sixteenth century Malacca. David Mitchell, the author of *Cloud Atlas* (2004), comments that that if you 'travel far enough, you meet yourself' (282). The same can be said about the narrator's journey in Lazaroo's text. The story of her ancestor enables her to traverse the boundaries of time and space to encounter an image of herself. Despite the strong parallels between herself and her ancestor, the narrator does not easily relate the tenor of the story to her own precarious 'in-between' position.

To this end, the suburban environment described by the narrator reflects this in-betweenness. Scholars such as Graeme Davidson and Nathanael O'Reilly have often associated suburbia with ideas of in-betweenness, hybridity, and third space. The idea of

suburbia has always been contingent on constructing a space between the cityscape and the natural landscape. In effect, suburbia communicates different characteristics of these two seemingly independent spaces.

Throughout the narrative, these conflicts evolve to take on different shapes and configurations. The relationship between the narrator's Eurasian father and Anglo−Australian mother embodies one of the many conflicts that take place within the narrative. Despite the fact that their marriage symbolises the coming together of two cultures, underneath the surface exists a simmering turbulence. The marriage, which later in the mother's floating story, the father alludes to as unwanted, symbolises a collision between Eurasian and Anglo−Australian cultures that highlights the children's own battles with cultural encounters.

The narrator's father characterises a sort of paradox in his feelings towards Whiteness and his position as a postcolonial subject. After her father's face-off with their British neighbour, the narrator deduces that her father possesses a 'long-supressed, smouldering resentment of the British colonial bosses' (Lazaroo 58). Despite this resentment, however, he also projects a resistance towards his own heritage. His refusal to bring material possessions that symbolise his Eurasian heritage to Australia, things he terms as 'rubbish' (Lazaroo 13) and 'useless' (Lazaroo 15), indicate a sense of embarrassment towards his Asianness. The text also reveals the inferiority complex he has in regards to the English and his need to seek their approval. A visit by his English in-laws, therefore, has the narrator's father on edge as 'he remembered just enough about English colonials from his boyhood to agonise about doing such things in the right way' (Lazaroo 30), and when praised, the father 'quivered with pride and trepidation' (Lazaroo 30). It is only later, after his divorce and remarriage to Dawn, and when Asianness is romanticised and exoticised, that he attempts to recover a sense of Asianness within himself. However, whatever effort he puts into recovering this aspect of himself is also ultimately marred by his own exoticising of Asianness.

In contrast to her husband, the narrator's Anglo Australian mother tries to counter 'the seeping away of Asia' (Lazaroo 31) from the narrator and her siblings. Even before the big move from Singapore, the mother tries 'desperately to hold on to the little she had come to know of Singapore Eurasian culture, even when her husband tries 'to shed it, as if it embarrassed him' (Lazaroo 22). Her decision to bring Eurasian material artefacts to Australia such as the grandfather's list written on a fragile piece of paper, the 'granite toomba-toomba' and 'the blue and white porcelain pickle jars' (Lazaroo 15) demonstrates her effort to keep in contact with Singapore Eurasian culture for her children, if not for herself. The narrator comments,

> My mother joined two worlds together by marrying my father and having
>
> us children. When my father left her, she tried to keep their two worlds
>
> joined together by continuing to tell us floating stories tied tenuously to
>
> Dad's and her pasts. (Lazaroo 146)

Her floating story concerning Mr. Annunciato and his first-wife-to-be is an allusion to her own, troubled story of marrying into a Eurasian family. It speaks of the conflict and tension of having to negotiate a culture unlike her own and how she feels the constant need to find a sense of approval and belonging within her husband's critical family. For her, Singapore was her 'world waiting to be made', where she leaves Australia behind for a new, albeit romanticised opportunity to start life with an Asian family. The mother's desires mirror the father's in an inverted image of belonging.

As the title suggests, *The World Waiting to be Made* conveys an image of a vast, empty land similar to the way Australia was seen as *Terra Australis Incognita,* the unknown southern land (Major cvii). Yet, as demonstrated throughout the text, the phrase means different things for different people. For the Dias family, at least at the beginning of their life in Australia, 'the world waiting to be made' represented a new opportunity to leave the small island of

Singapore. This new hope and optimism, however, is marred upon arrival as the customs officers remarks,

> 'Looks like we might be having curry for dinner, Jim,' the officer shouted
>
> to his mate working at the other desk.
>
> His mate looked at my father's dark-skinned face. 'Sure as hell's not yellow
>
> enough for chop suey, Dave.' I watched this man, Dave, so carefully that
>
> you might think I saw a stick in his hand: would he point out a new
>
> direction for us to play, or would he beat us all with it? …
>
> This was in 1966, only a couple of years after the Assimilation Section of
>
> the Australian Immigration Department had become the Integration
>
> Section.
>
> My feet were already burning. (Lazaroo 24-5)

This exchange between the two officers not only highlights the racist undertones that will dog the family's life in Australia, but it also signals the ambivalence the narrator will confront throughout her childhood about ideas of Asianness and Eurasianness. The officer's references to types of Asian food points to the problematising of skin colour, highlighting the racism and the homogenising views of Asians by some white Australians. Eurasians are neither Chinese nor Indian, but this does not stop the officers from trying to pigeon-hole the family into a familiar view of the Other.

In reality, the histories of Eurasians are plural and varied, and indeed come with different kinds of configurations. As Christine Choo et al. point out in their study of Eurasians in Australia, there is no single definitive identity attached to Eurasians (Choo et. al 71). The diversity of their origins and historical contact are important factors in a cultural gap that need to be recognised. Although the histories and backgrounds of Eurasians are diverse, the Eurasian community from which the narrator is descended is historically and

geographically specific. In the novel, Lazaroo refers to the history and culture of the Christao Eurasians who have spread out particularly across Malaysia and Singapore. The narrator explains, 'The Christao are descended from those Malaccans with both Portuguese and Malay blood' (Lazaroo 19). Michelle Barrett surmises that Malaysian and Singaporean Eurasian communities are a colonial legacy (Barrett 104). The ancestry of Christao Eurasians can be traced back to the Portuguese conquest of the Kingdom of Malacca in 1511. After successfully quelling the resistance of the Malaccans, the Portuguese built a settlement in the kingdom. There, many Portuguese intermarried with the local population, and thus, began the line of Malaccan Eurasians. Today, many Malaccan Eurasians trace their ancestry not only to the Portuguese, but also to Dutch and British lineage through subsequent colonisations of Malacca and the Malay Peninsula. It is because of this history that Eurasians in Malaysia and Singapore may identify with multifaceted and transcultural identities.

In effect, the problems of skin colour and the context of Eurasian history go beyond that exchange between the two immigration officers and come into play throughout the novel. As examined in Hsu-Ming Teo's text, *Behind the Moon*, the issue of skin is a confronting one. The polarised experiences of the narrator and her twin, in particular, demonstrate how the archaic notion of somatic identification through skin colour delineates intermittent racial passing for one twin and sustained marginalisation for the other:

> Collecting cicadas in my used brown paper lunch bag one recess time at
> school, I heard the jeer: 'Chocolate girl! Yah-hah!'
>
> I turned to see my twin sister's front tooth fly from her mouth and land on
> the bitumen, spattered with her blood. … I ran to my sister, shaking
> cicadas from the bag to dab it on her lip.
>
> 'You are lucky, you are paler than me,' she sobbed. (Lazaroo 31)

For the narrator, who inherits some of their mother's Anglo Australian colouring, socialising with other Australian children in the neighbourhood and in school is still difficult, but less often antagonising. Born with a much darker complexion than her twin, however, the narrator's sister is often victimised and ostracised. The twin's bullying, which is a social practice founded upon the idea of difference, demonstrates the polarity of their social positioning. This inferiority complex associated with her Asianness is reminiscent of Franz Fanon's theorisation of skin colour. Frantz Fanon argues that through the positioning afforded by somatic factors, the subject 'Other' gradually develops a sense of insufficiency and reliance within a society of the powerful 'Us' (Fanon 109).

The narrator's engagement with feelings of being different is further compounded through various material artefacts. Some of the artefacts function to further separate her from the dominant cultural centre. Sue's Barbie dolls are a more telling exemplification of this sense of inadequacy:

> Sue had a California Barbie. 'Ken is Daddy and Barbie is Mummy,' she observed. The picture fitted Sue's real parents well enough, allowing her mother a few shades of blonding rinse and taking a few inches of paunch off her father.
>
> Sue walked over to the lilly pilly tree. She squashed the small purple fruit onto her Barbie doll's protuberant breasts. The purple juice stained the doll's band-aid pink chest.
>
> 'This is how they dress in Oobla-Oobla land where you come from,' she explained. (Lazaroo 29)

Barbie, introduced to the market in the 1960s by Mattel, has since become a popular cultural icon and is closely associated with suburban culture. As a material commodity, Barbie is geared towards a white, middle-class, and heterosexual market. Within the context of

American capitalist culture, designed and engineered to project a certain image of femininity, Barbie also embodies constructions of what it means to be a woman. Jacqueline Urla and Alan C. Swedlund argue that Barbie demonstrates the way 'in which gender in the late twentieth century has become a commodity in itself' (124). However, Barbie is not only a site for highlighting gender difference; she also functions as a site that projects racial commodification. Ann du Cille offers an insightful study of Barbie, multiculturalism and how differences of gender and race are merchandised. She explains how the introduction of multicultural Barbie dolls, such as Shani and friends, fails to dislodge a racial hierarchy that focuses on the idea of Whiteness and Otherness (du Cille 51-3). She suggests that although multicultural Barbie dolls diversified the market, the range of coloured dolls with similar features inevitably inverts the diversity back into notions of sameness. Similarly, Elizabeth Chin's article, "Ethnically Correct Dolls: Toying with the Race Industry" (1999) is a study of ethnically correct dolls. The article reveals that although the introduction of these new dolls addresses concerns to ensure minority representation, the dolls essentially reinforce racial boundaries by their juxtaposition with the original and authentic Barbie (Chin 305). Sue's Oobla-Oobla Barbie doll plays along similar lines. We can see how racial hierarchy and power are reinforced by this act of innocent child play as the Oobla-Oobla doll does not even merit proper clothing.

Sue's innocent use of the label, 'Oobla Oobla,' signifies the narrator's pejorative association. The Barbie's stained breasts denote an appropriation of a racist stereotype of Asians and tells the narrator of her status as 'different' and 'inferior'. This exchange with Sue and the Barbie doll will later manifest itself in the classroom, where Mr Scrivener shows the class a 'sepia-coloured slide' showing 'a dark-skinned man in a loincloth' (Lazaroo 78), which can be seen as an accompaniment to the Oobla Oobla Barbie, an image which is then superimposed onto the narrator by her classmates. To further complicate matters, Sue's association of Barbie and Ken with her own parents also highlights how suburban parents are supposed to look. In essence, Ken will never represent the narrator's Eurasian father.

Lazaoo describes the Dias family as the only Eurasian, and possibly only Asian, family in the two suburban neighbourhoods described in the text. Therefore, the pressure of trying to fit in is even more palpable. Lazaroo contrasts the family's life in their 'cramped Housing for the People flat' (Lazaroo 15) with the space of Australia. Yet, this space heightens their sense of isolation and Otherness from the rest of the suburbanites. Isolation becomes a resonating theme in the text. The Dias's first suburban residence is located in a less than desirable neighbourhood and already the unwelcoming atmosphere is seen through the narrator's observation:

> The State housing suburb, near whose border we lived, lay between two
>
> swamps on the edge of a busy road. One morning, ASIANS GO HOME
>
> appeared in yellow paint on the pale green concrete bus shelter across the
>
> road from our house.
>
> 'Don't worry, you don't look like a slope or a boong,' the girl over the
>
> road, Sue, assured me. (Lazaroo 27)

The disorientation of being in a new place is compounded by the sense of not being welcomed by the host society. The yellow paint used in the racial graffiti indicates the threat of the 'yellow peril' in the neighbourhood. Sue's attempt to comfort the narrator by telling her that she does not have the features of a 'slope' or a 'boong', derogatory references to Asians and Indigenous Australians, only serves to heighten the tension within the narrator. She develops an acute awareness that 'Asians' and 'Asianness' are not welcomed in this world waiting to be made and from this point, she has to confront the reality that being Asian is undesirable. Both the narrator and her father are ashamed of their Asian heritage and consciously try to hide any indication that they are Asian. The father does this by trying to find the most 'Australian' home, in order to blend in with the neighbours.

The story behind the family's long search for the Romeo House epitomises the family's ongoing efforts to blend in and mask their Asianness. After the sewerage tank in

their previous home becomes defective, 'returning excrement to its senders' (Lazaroo 54), the narrator's father believes that it is time for the family to move to another house. Symbolically, the family's episode with the septic tank reveals how the dream of the Australian suburban life sits precariously on something always best repressed beneath the surface of appearances.

The search for the house that would be the ultimate disguise against the *hantus* and their own Asianness is extensive. In finding a new home, the father is 'looking for a new and powerful spell against demons'. Without this powerful spell to disguise his family, he feels as if they are living 'in a jungle camp for Aliens' (Lazaroo 60). Hence, he determines that the best home would be the most Australian-looking one. This notion of an 'Australian-looking' house' is a difficult concept to pin down. The many visits to houses and home displays highlight the Australian affiliation to a sense of Europeanness. It is only after a lot of effort that the narrator's father is enticed by an advertisement that encapsulates his idea of a good disguise:

> True blue Romeo, where art thou? Open plan living for Australians who
> love living in the land of wide open spaces. Feature walls, balcony, bar,
> minstrel's gallery. Sliding doors, patio, pergola. Sumptuous drapes. For
> true, blue Aussies with a taste for international sophistication, this one
> includes at no extra cost, a bidet. (Lazaroo 66)

The advertisement reflects how the idea of the suburban home is important in projecting a certain image. The excerpt above demonstrates how this advertisement plays with the idea of a national identity. Those who strongly identify with being true-blue Aussie would see the attraction in the house.

Similar to her father's need to hide the family's Asianness through the façade of the house, the narrator hides her Asianness under the bed along with the *hantus* or ghosts who followed the family from Singapore. The narrator's act of hiding objects and ornaments from

her birth country under the bed is a symbolic gesture in the settlement of a new home. Divya Tolia-Kelly argues that visual cultures within a migrant home are important in the process of identity construction (Tolia-Kelly 324). Similarly, in the study of objects within the homes of three Eurasian women in Australia, Scholars interested in the importance of material culture, such as Jules David Prown and Michelle Barrett, note that the positioning of objects and ornaments goes beyond aesthetic value (Prown 2; Barrett 107). The study of material cultures, particularly everyday objects, reveals the social meanings of these ornaments and how their positioning illustrates what they represent. Barrett's study reveals the three Eurasian women in her study utilise various ornaments, whether brought with them during migration or purchased, to anchor a sense of Asianness in their homes. Similarly, the narrator's choice of putting her old, worn *'Good Morning'* hand towel from Singapore under the bed indicates the shame she feels about being part Asian and how the Australian items she keeps are a contrast to the Asian ones,

> While the Asian items were to be kept hidden and secret, the Australian
> ones were accessories I planned to bring out and use when my
> sophisticated and glorious future arrived.
>
> This is how my bed came to shelter my own altar to the world waiting to
> be made. (Lazaroo 32)

This use of the bed as an altar for cultivating a sense of being Australian and also as a place to hide her Asianness demonstrates the pressures of trying to fit in. Just as Barrett notes, the positioning of these items within the migrant home is significant. Through her examination of different Eurasian women and their association with these material artefacts, the positioning of these items signifies how well these women identify with their Eurasian heritage. For the narrator, it seems to emphasise the disconnection between her selves and how she feels about her Asian heritage. However, it is important to note that rather than throwing away the items, the narrator chooses to hide them instead. This suggests that the

narrator still loves these items, even though she is ashamed of them, highlighting the tension she feels about her own identity.

Throughout the novel, the concept of in-betweenness is also reflected in the play between suburbia and 'nature', particularly in the garden as a border zone between homogeneity and diversity. Throughout the novel, images of the garden are employed to reflect the ambivalence of identity and the Eurasian family's efforts to belong.

In his study of suburbia as a mediator between urbanism and nature, Trevor Hogan suggests that the suburban garden is part of a 'culture of erasure' (66) that works towards homogeneity. The garden of the Romeo House captures this dynamic. After having grown wild with native flora and fauna, the narrator comments that her father and his partner, Dawn, 'tamed' the garden 'into something more civilised' (Lazaroo 207) after moving into the house. This domestication of native plants in the garden reflects the narrator's own experience of having to change herself to suit the suburban 'aesthetic'. This concept is reflected not just in the efforts of the narrator's father to produce a 'tame' garden, but also in the rosebushes in Twitty's gardens, the Cunningham's 'kidney-shaped pond full of Loo Blue' (Lazaroo 35), and the similarity of houses and gardens in neighbouring suburbs. These images all contribute to the impression of the Australian suburbs as a homogenised space.

In the latter half of the novel, this relationship is inverted to present the idea of suburban culture within the vast Australian natural landscape. This is documented in the arrival of the narrator at a teaching post in an Aboriginal community up in northern Western Australia. The small teaching staff, who were all products 'of Perth's suburban sprawl' (Lazaroo 178), try to establish the sense of civility and domesticity of the suburbs in the country. The narrator notes as she arrives at the community that

> these lawns were the squares of bright green I'd seen from the air,
>
> improbably lush against the powdery orange earth and the more muted,
>
> almost grey-green of the natural environment'. (Lazaroo 177)

The contrast Lazaroo creates between the natural Australian landscape and the artificiality imposed by the lawns in the text places emphasis on the absurdity of trying to establish suburban culture in the bush.

The imperialist underpinning of the 'suburban' teaching community is evidenced by the teaching philosophy. The narrator notes that her responsibility as a teacher is 'to teach the girls from the Aboriginal school … the way Australians were supposed to live' (Lazaroo 180), echoing Rudyard Kipling's thoughts on the responsibility to civilise other cultural groups in his work, "The White Man's Burden" (1899). The need to teach the students to be 'proper' Australians is reminiscent of the racial discrimination and anxiety that the narrator experienced in her adolescence. The sense of inadequacy associated because with being different, had led the narrator to live her life as if in a masquerade.

However, a more liberating experience comes with the narrator's time spent at the beach. The beach has always been associated with the Australian lifestyle in a way that can again create an idea of homogenous identity. For Lazaroo's narrator, however, the experience of the beach has an opposite effect. In contrast to the neighbourhood, the school, and even the narrator's own home, in which she is constantly scrutinised and judged, the beach is portrayed as removed from the confines of societal trappings. Instead, the beach offers the narrator a means of escape:

> I went to escape the sorrowing and shouting at home and the blurriness of
> who I was. It was a relief to watch the dancing horizon from the curve of
> the dunes and rocks to smell the pickling odours of salt and seaweed, to be
> absorbed into the sea's breathing without having to join the summertime
> show of flesh on the sand. …
>
> I found nothing to press my heart here.

I headed for the dunes, where I invented ways of escaping … I was a

fugitive from my parents' home and a fugitive from my Australian peers.

(Lazaroo 121)

For the narrator, the beach is a liminal space that is allegorical of her 'in-between' sense of identity. Positioned between land and sea, the beach is an open horizon that presents the narrator with endless possibilities. Unlike her friends, who view the beach as a site of Australian beach culture, the narrator liberates the image of the beach and uses it for her own self. It provides her with a symbolic space, allowing her to re-negotiate the many facets of self that had seemed to be in constant conflict, but which can feel reconciled in that physical environment. As the narrator goes through adulthood, this sense of reconciliation between different aspects of self becomes a natural state she is able to embrace. As a childhood environment, however, the suburb remains a force of erasure. Whether in built form or through ideas associated with it, suburbia is portrayed as a gendered and racialised hegemonic order.

The next section examines a more recent novel that further perpetuates the idea of suburbia as a repository of cultural fantasy particularly for migrants. Where Lazaroo's text examines the realities of suburban living for a minority family, Siew Siang Tay's *Handpicked* (2004), reveals how suburbia exists as a repository of the fantasy of a good life, a fantasy that ultimately fails to live up to reality. It illustrates how suburbia is perceived by those who are looking in from the outside and have yet to experience it. It creates an interchange with Lazaroo's *The World Waiting to be Made* by contrasting reality with the fantasy of suburbia. Like *The World Waiting to be Made*, it is difficult to say whether *Handpicked* is a truly anti-suburban text. However, by examining the plight of mail-order brides and the limited options presented to them, it shows how the Australian suburb is an unstable repository of dreams.

The Mail-Order Suburban Fantasy in Siew Siang Tay's *Handpicked* (2004)

In 1992, Siew Siang Tay migrated to Australia from Malaysia. *Handpicked* is Tay's first novel and it won the HarperCollins Varuna Awards for Manuscript Development in 2007. It is interesting to note that of all the authors whose texts we have examined thus far, Siew Siang Tay is the first author to write outside her cultural subjectivity. Although she was originally from Malaysia, Tay writes from the subject position of someone outside the indigenous Ibanese community in East Malaysia. The Ibanese are considered part of the *bumiputera*, or 'sons of the soil' cultural group, who are recognised as one of the native cultural groups in the country. Tay's story of Laila examines the life of the East Malaysian indigenous communities, which are underrepresented in literature. Moreover, she also examines another important subject position, that of the often vilified Asian mail-order bride.

To put it simply, the mail-order bride is a controversial figure. In her examination of Asian Australian marriages, Kathryn Robinson comments that the mail-order bride has become an important symbol that highlights how Australia continues to view Asia (53). It continues to feed the long-existing tension between East and West and the Occidental–Oriental rhetoric. Asia, she also argues, is fast becoming a site of fantasy for a growing number of Australian men who feel that the status of male dominance within the traditional family unit is slowly being weakened. It is an Orientalist and sexist logic, whereby Asia, through stereotypical representations, provides these men with the opportunity to strengthen their sense of masculinity. Robinson also notes that the mail-order bride has become a 'pejorative image' (53) which represents mainly Asian women, particularly Filipino women, who marry white Australian men.

The mail-order bride industry, which has grown exponentially due to marriage agencies' use of the Internet to attract clientele, highlights how the commodification of women has taken on another face in contemporary society. It epitomises the increasingly globalised movement of the female labour force, most of whom will almost certainly end up

as caretakers or domestic workers, such as nurses, and in other instances, mail-order brides (Zare and Mendoza 366). In particular, comment Zare and Mendoza, mail-order brides

> blur the boundary between love and commercial transaction, raising the
>
> question whether the marriage is primarily contracted out of love or an
>
> understood commercial exchange of emotional and sexual labor for some
>
> form of economic provision. (366)

Despite the circumstances that have forced some of these women into the industry, male-order brides have a questionable reputation in Australia. Mainly in Australian media, the mail-order bride is often demonised as a gold-digger. They are seen as tricksters who often charm decent and unassuming Australian men into marrying them through an illusion of love and companionship (Robinson 54). Not only are mail-order brides denigrated, but they are also subjected to various stereotypes, including that of meek, obedient and submissive slaves. Robinson explains how the image of the mail-order bride is constructed:

> The particular construction of the 'mail-order bride', the sensual sex slave,
>
> and the counterview of the oriental bride as the salvation of traditional
>
> family values, can be understood as constructions of the other in the
>
> Australian quest for identity. The negative stereotype which is the
>
> prevailing one relates both to issues of female subordination in our own
>
> society and to the ideological justification of our position as an affluent
>
> country in a region of the world where poverty is still the norm. (60)

Laila is one of these marginalised figures. Having lived in a shabby longhouse all her life, in an existence she calls a 'hell hole' (Tay 4), she abandons her family in Sarawak to marry a South Australian man named Jim. She believes that Jim and his suburban house will offer her an escape from the communality and poverty of the Ibanese community. Before her journey, she plans and strategises her dreams for a better life through a photograph of a suburban home that Jim sent her. When she arrives, she discovers that Jim has deceived her

into believing that the house is his and that in reality his only home is a shabby caravan she is now obliged to share as his wife.

When on the way to Renmark on her first day in Australia, she truly believes that 'the red brick exterior will soon come into view' and that 'the white bay window will leap out first' (Tay 15). What greets her is not a suburban house with a white picket fence, but a small and dirty caravan located near the Murray River. She describes the caravan as a 'shoebox on wheels', a tiny shed' (Tay 19). The caravan essentially destroys her dreams of 'fluffy towels, the sweet scent of bath gel, the sofa in the living room' (Tay 19-20) and she finally recognises that Jim has, in fact, deceived her.

As Lazaroo juxtaposes the image of spacious suburbia with the small and dense apartment units in Singapore in *The World Waiting to be Made*, Tay triangulates the desirable image of the suburban home with the undesirability of the longhouse in Sarawak and Jim's caravan. Although the longhouse represents Laila's past and the caravan her present, both of these spaces symbolise different forms of entrapment. For Laila, the longhouse is a site of poverty, limited possibilities and patriarchal control. She believes that by staying there, she faces a future that has already been decided for her. She comments that she will be forced to marry an Ibanese boy and yet 'she was determined not to end up like the other girls, chained to the longhouse for the rest of their lives (Tay 2). The traditional longhouse is a communal residential unit housing a number of Ibanese families at one time. Clifford Sather, in his analysis of the longhouse as a ritually constituted structure, argues it forms the main community within Ibanese culture (68). Because it is a communal form of housing, individual families living in their respective *bilik* or 'room', share common areas. Hence, the longhouse lacks privacy and individual space:

> Laila thinks of all the years of cleaning, ironing, weaving, chopping,
>
> cooking, eating, arguing, studying and sleeping in these sixteen square
>
> metres of floor space. Night after night, bodies colliding with each other,

her mother and father lying against one wall, Jeannie, Krisno and her lined

up at another. (Tay 2)

Much like the narrator's shame at her Asianness in Lazaroo's text, Laila is ashamed of what the longhouse symbolises. The life of the Ibanese community is a source of pain and humiliation for Laila and she tries her best to ensure that Jim does not become a witness to it. When her father asks why Jim is not there to escort her like a proper man, Laila explains that she refuses to let Jim witness the shabbiness of the longhouse. This shame is strengthened by her belief that a life with Jim will be a desirable change and an improvement on her life in Sarawak.

Instead of being the impetus for change and the start of a better life, the caravan replaces the Ibanese longhouse with its own form of misery and entrapment. Like the longhouse, it perpetuates another form of domestic drudgery, and after having lived in a communal unit, introduces Laila to the experience of alienation and isolation that is heightened by Renmark's rural location and the absence of a kinship system. This disappointment in Jim and his caravan only accentuates Laila's desire for a house of her own, which is strengthened by her first encounter with a real Australian suburban home:

> Rows of homes line the road, fronted by large neat gardens, one with an
>
> entire wall covered with creepers … Then she catches the sight of a red
>
> brick house beside it. Her heart skips a beat. It looks exactly like the house
>
> in Jim's photo. Her eyes scan the white window frames, porch held up by
>
> the fat pillars, the straight lines of the grey roof … She leaps onto the
>
> porch, faces the hallway. The carpet is light green, the pile thick. She
>
> imagines how it would feel under her soles. (Tay 53)

Obtaining a glimpse of the suburban lifestyle gives Laila a sense of purpose, a goal of ensuring a house in her foreseeable future by encouraging Jim to save enough money. Yet unbeknown to Laila until much later, Jim is incapable of saving money to support her effort.

Not only is he unable to financially support the idea of buying the house, Jim is also resistant to the idea of it. For him, 'house' is a dreaded word (Tay 158) that would eventually unravel everything he finds comfortable in his life with Laila. The word is also a constant reminder of his guilt over feeding Laila false expectations about himself and their future together.

Laila's unhappiness only fuels her determination to fulfil her suburban dream. As time goes on and her hopes of living in a house gradually slip away, Laila's suburban fantasy becomes so acute that she begins to see images of her fantasy within material artefacts. These images serve as a source of encouragement and a reminder of dreams of a better life, and also of her sacrifices. The scene involving a cross-stitch kit of a house demonstrates the embeddedness of Laila's fantasy about having a 'true' suburban home:

> Laila looks at the kit named Our House. A frontal view of a brick house
>
> stares at her. White window frames, white fence. The only difference is
>
> that the wall is made of cream brick. Her heart leaps for a split second …
>
> Soon, she's walking out of the shop, Our House clutched snugly against
>
> her chest. (Tay 134-46)

Laila's work on the cross-stitch elevates her 'excitement' (Tay 141) as the image of a house starts to take shape. Her disdain for the caravan and her frustration about her dreams of living in a house are demonstrated by her distress in trying to find space to hang the completed work. Its significance is further emphasised when Marietta, trying to alleviate her depression, tells her, 'it's just a wall-hanging'. Laila responds that the cross-stitch 'is not *just* a wall hanging' (Tay 142). For Laila, the small, almost trivial decorative object serves as a reminder of what she came to Australia to find and of her plans for the future.

The increasing unhappiness between Laila and Jim is contrasted by the happy marriage between Marietta and Peter. The two couples come from similar circumstances, as Laila and Marietta are both 'Asian brides' and Peter and Jim are both working class Australian men. However, unlike Jim, Peter takes great care in making sure Marietta is happy

and meeting his responsibilities to her. He is the one to admonish Jim for being untruthful to Laila when Jim confesses to him that Laila is not happy.

> 'Shit, Jim,' he says. 'You standing in front of Mum's house. Red bricks,
>
> perfect garden, white picket fence. What would she be thinking?' (Tay 75).

Peter even goes as far as defending Laila when Jim blames her for her own unhappiness. However, even the happy story of Peter and Marietta's relationship serves to show the almost accidental fortune of women seeking a better future through marriage and migration. Marietta's happy marriage with Peter highlights one of the rare cases of happiness for women who have been trafficked through the mail-order bride industry.

Whereas Laila's father is a strict and rigid patriarchal figure, Jim embodies a different facet of the male figure, representing the benign misogyny underlying Australian culture. His decision to turn to the mail-order bride as a simple alternative demonstrates this. Additionally, Jim also denies Laila's need for a sense of financial independence and instead feels the need for her to stay at home in their caravan. When Laila suggests that she should also work in the orchard to earn more money for a house, Jim disagrees and tells her 'no wife of mine is going to work' (Tay 158). Instead, Laila is confined at home to perform domestic chores, which ironically, is the future she wanted to escape from in Sarawak and a future Jim promised to free her from.

Zare and Mendoza theorise that the dynamics of these marriage transactions expose the interchange between prejudice and exoticism (366). At one end of the scale, these marriages symbolise how the disadvantaged Other is discriminated by gender, class, and race. At the same time, the Other is also exoticised, fantasised, and desired. The relationship between Laila and Jim operates mostly on this interchange between prejudice and desire. Despite having no money, Jim believes he can make Laila happy by providing her with things he believes every woman wants. He tries to 'doll her up' by telling her to pick out a wedding

dress and when she refuses, tries to buy her happiness by giving her some money to spend (Tay 69).

Their heated exchange about Laila's desire to work reveals that Jim is neither dependable nor flexible, and ultimately is not a good option for her. Their argument about money exposes the fact that his finances are in a shambles. Other than a small portion of inheritance left behind by his late mother, Jim does not have anything saved nor is he in possession of any other assets besides the caravan. Despite the dire state of his finances, he still refuses to save or put more effort into finding a stable form of employment. Much like the photo of the house, Jim lies to Laila by omission. In effect, his lies about the house and the money give him power over her, further damning her to isolation and to the reality of the caravan:

> Laila sits there and contemplates her life. She sees the entire country of
>
> Australia spinning around her, orbiting around the miserable little caravan.
>
> One person. She only knows one person in his country. And he has let her
>
> down. (Tay 57)

Ultimately, Laila's situation shows the vulnerability of migrant women who seek marriage as an economic arrangement. Migrant women, like Laila, have no income, no connections, and no kinship support. Thus, these women are presented with limited options and opportunities, placing them at the mercy of their partners.

The novel also serves to reiterate the plight of migrant women in Australia by highlighting acts of misogynist aggression. Whereas Jim is guilty of perpetuating a sort of benign and casual form of misogyny, Sean, a wealthy real estate agent, exemplifies a more aggressive representation of misogyny and sexism. After meeting him at a party hosted by Jim's employer, Laila is taken by Sean's friendly demeanour. At first glance, Sean seems to possess qualities that Jim lacks; he is mature, possesses a steady employment and is financially stable. Jim's refusal to change and Sean's advances seduce Laila into the decision to leave Jim

and further her dreams with Sean. Initially Laila seems to be content with her decision. She now lives in nice house with Sean, overlooking the sea, with her 'fairytale finally coming together' (Tay 248):

> Sean. The perfect lover. His wealth is there for her to share. He implied that, when they discussed her moving in with him, that she could treat his house as if it were her own. His kindness touched her. (Tay 247)

Sean's kindness and the size and beauty of his home create a mirage that hides the domestic trap that Laila still occupies. She does not immediately realise that while the setting may have changed, her predicament remains the same. Much like Jim's caravan, Laila is still alone in Sean's house. Deluded by the idea of 'playing wife' (Tay 251), Laila does not immediately register the same threat of entrapment. This illusion is finally shattered when she realises that behind Sean's kindness lies brutality. Laila discovers this side of Sean after accidentally breaking a glass in the kitchen. The scene spirals into violence against Laila, revealing Sean to be an abusive and misogynist man. Domestic abuse is at the crux of many mail-order bride experiences (Narayan 105) and this episode underscores the vulnerability of migrant women. Laila's experience with Sean destabilises her perception of happiness which is closely associated with tenets of suburban culture.

For Laila, both the caravan and Sean's house are gendered geographies that project ideas of female confinement. In her book *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps* (1993), Shirley Ardener argues that how a space is organised defines the social structure or hierarchy within its boundaries. They are also spaces of social isolation. Other than her friendship with Marietta, a Filipino woman who lives in another caravan, Laila does not establish any other friendships. Instead, she plays the role of caretaker, hired help, and bed-warmer for Sean and Jim. In Jim's case, Laila even takes on the role of surrogate mother as Jim lacks the maturity to take care of himself.

Throughout Laila's ordeal in Australia, the natural landscape plays a pivotal role in keeping her grounded. Just as the beach acts as a liminal space for the young narrator in Lazaroo's *The World Waiting to be Made*, the Murray River and the Rejang River are important spaces within Laila's narrative. They operate as reflective spaces for comfort and nostalgia. The Rejang River, which is one of the longest rivers in the Malaysia, has a calming effect on her:

> The Rejang River unfolds before her. She breathes in the muddy scent, the
> familiar earthy odour. The flat expanse of the river spreads out like a lake.
> She'll miss the river. She'll miss the calming effect of the water, wind
> tossing her hair, currents swelling and roaring during monsoons.
> Shimmering water and wails of hornbills. (Tay 5)

In the same way, when Laila moves to Renmark to live with Jim, the river becomes a place where she feels comforted and at peace, away from the confines of the caravan:

> An earthy scent rises from the riverbank. Vaguely familiar but with a
> different edge, a different texture from the tropical scents she grew up
> with. Scuffing sounds come from the upper slope of the riverbank … She
> recognises the crows, four of them, big strong bodies, pecking at the
> ground, then breaks up in the air, squawking. They look like the ones in
> Sarawak, except they are black and white whereas the ones back home are
> pure black. Laila faces the river, trying to locate the pelican, but it is
> nowhere in sight. The water is now a long flowing mirror. The stillness
> envelops her, chokes her. She cannot bring herself to move. (Tay 39)

Laila's relationships with the Murray River and the Rejang River demonstrate the topophilic and topophobic emotions people associate with places. While the term 'topophilia' refers to a person's positive emotional ties with the material environment, topophobia is described by humanistic geographers as a fear or dislike associated with a particular place or

landscape (Tuan 4). Both of these rivers provide a means for Laila to escape from the longhouse and the caravan, two sites that evoke a sense of topophobia within her. The longhouse and the caravan foreshadow a possible future where she is trapped within a mundane life cycle of domesticity and poverty. Both Jim and Sean, at one point, symbolise her means of escape from a certain future, but later become sources of disappointment and pain.

Laila's experiences with both Jim and Sean demonstrate the reality of the lives of many trafficked women in Australia, whose agency is potentially restricted by social isolation and lack of financial independence. At the end of the novel, Laila returns to Jim and the caravan, recognising that she has few other options available to her. However, although her future may look bleak, the novel does suggest that she can build a more promising future with hard work and a more realistic understanding of the limitations of her circumstances. Although her dream of an idealised suburban lifestyle is shattered, she has found the inner resources to survive and to influence Jim to become a better man.

Conclusion

Simone Lazaroo's *The World Waiting to be Made* and Siew Siang Tay's *Handpicked* depict from two different perspectives the material, cultural and psychological ramifications of suburbia for migrant Asian women. In both texts the Australian experiences of the two protagonists are stained by a racialised, gendered, and classed hegemony. Lazaroo's text highlights the realities of suburban culture for migrants in a homogenising and casually intolerant suburban Perth between the 1960s and the 1990s. At the heart of the novel, the theme of cultural and corporeal differences is explored through the narrator's confrontation with and negotiation of her Asianness. In comparison, Tay's novel examines the pursuit of the suburban lifestyle from the perspective of a character living outside the space. It shows how, for migrant women like Laila, suburbia is a powerful symbol of change and a better life, which is highly desirable but highly unattainable.

The Great Australian Dream, which looms large within the narratives of the two protagonists, is posited as the standard to which the characters in these two texts aspire but ultimately fail to achieve. As is made clear in the case of Lazaroo's narrator, living in the suburbs does not automatically make someone part of the suburb. Instead, in suburbia membership and inclusiveness are exclusive. In the end, both protagonists are forced to recognise their own placelessness within the Great Australian Dream. Both, however, are able to re-appraise their own states of in-betweenness, and understand that their own identity is 'waiting to be made'.

Chapter Five

Reading Transnational Landscapes in Nam Le's *The Boat* (2008) and Brian Castro's *Shanghai Dancing* (2003)

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the beach was examined as a form of liminal space in Simone Lazaroo's novel, *The World Waiting to be Made*. Positioned at the fringes of the sea, the beach presents the young narrator with an open horizon. With this open horizon comes the vision of a future that presents endless possibilities, contrasting with the limitations imposed by suburban life, which is regulated by class, race and gender. Following that discussion, this chapter draws on the ocean and the boat as recurring motifs of transnational mobility and the idea of 'belonging' in Nam Le's collection of short stories, *The Boat* (2008), and Brian Castro's fictional autobiography, *Shanghai Dancing* (2003).

The ocean is a vast and fluid landscape. It acts as a linking zone between various nation-states and their often-disputed borders. From the arrival of the first European settlers, the ocean became an indelible part of Australian history and culture, and yet the ocean is now also a site of heightened anxiety and fear posed by the imagined threat of immigrants impinging on Australia's lifestyle and economic prosperity. Australia's Abbott Government has continually campaigned to stop the arrival of boats carrying refugees who seek asylum. The government's tough stance against refugee boats has created geopolitical friction with Indonesia and has invited debate about the growing humanitarian crisis and about whether claims for asylum are being properly assessed. As demonstrated by Australia's continued fascination and unease towards 'boat people', many of the discussions surrounding the motif of the ocean seem to be closely associated with imagery of the boat.

Central to the image of the 'boat people' is the image of the boat itself. Whereas Australia's settler history is largely centred on early European boat arrivals, it was not until

the arrival of Vietnamese refugees as a result of the Vietnam War, a war that Australia entered in 1965, that the boat became attached to the image of refugees and Asian migration. The boat has become a focal point in debates about the ethics and experience of forced immigration and contemporary diasporic displacement. The international political storm generated by the Liberal government's "Stop the Boats" campaign has strained Australia's relationship with Indonesia. This policy also highlights the enduring relevance and significance of the image of the boat to Australia's cultural and social narratives. The story of the boat is often seen as the definitive life narrative for Asian Australians. However, this is no more than a gross generalisation. Although there are Asian migrants who arrive in Australia as boat refugees, there are also migrants who have come to Australia through different means and for different purposes. This view also discounts the long history of Asians in the country, which rivals the history of European settlement on the island. The misconception that members of the many different Asian communities in Australia are 'boat-people', refugees, or migrants problematises this dimension of what the boat imagery stands for. Yet, while the image of the boat in this context is rigid and limited, it can also be configured to challenge and subvert this well-established stereotype. As a vehicle and a symbol, the boat provides mobility and a means for people to cross physical, national, and symbolic borders. The rigidity imposed by the idea of borders and territories is weakened by use of the boat to cross them. In a play on the idea of 'border-crossing', refugees who seek asylum in other countries by boat are also known as 'border-crossers'. Their travel across different nation-state borders is not only a physical act of mobility; it can also cross symbolic and intangible borders. Hence, the boat represents a medium for traversing not only physical and geographical borders, but also different symbolic restrictions and limitations.

The act of border-crossing is associated with the theme of transnational identity and the possibilities that a transnational identity can entail. Transnational readings of Le's and Castro's texts demonstrate themes of transnational identity and the possibilities they can entail as the texts illustrate the lateral spread and reach of global mobility. In addition to the

concept of transnational identity as border-crossing, this chapter also focuses on the concept of the palimpsest as a metaphor for multiple or layered identities. In the texts, the idea of identity as mutable is realised through both the images of transnational border-crossing and the images of the palimpsest, as a layering of multiple identities in one place. Contemporary human mobility problematises traditional notions of identity and belonging because migrants experience two or more cultures. This phenomenon changes the ways in which people who experience migration imagine in relation to their host country, their attachments to their homeland and how they negotiate conflicting perceptions of 'home' and 'identity'. Le and Castro's texts, highlight how identity is not inherent, but is something to be discovered or uncovered. Within a more multidimensional context, identity becomes a 'sense' that continues to unfold in a state of unending composition and metamorphosis.

As a collection of short stories covering a wide range of different experiences and narratives, there initially appears to be no thematic link in Nam Le's *The Boat*. Even Le, in an interview with Sophie Cunningham in 2009, admitted that despite his effort to tie the stories 'around a sort of logic of unity or coherence', he realised 'how all over the shop they really were' (135). In response to Le's comment, Cunningham argues that the lack of coherence provides a sense of unity in the text around the concept of movement. She adds, 'that's why *The Boat* is such a great title — it gives the sense of a journey' (135).

Cunningham's comment on the sense of journey that the text creates is given more analysis in this chapter. These stories seem to be loosely linked by different sets of personal journeys in which the characters negotiate their way through a sense of pain, loss, and recovery. Whereas the first and final short stories in the collection focus on the history of Vietnam and Australia, the other stories deal with places such as New York, Iran, and Hiroshima. The text also highlights the plight of characters as diverse as a terminally ill painter, a woman in Tehran during the revolution, and a Japanese girl moments before the dropping of the first atomic bomb in 1945. Instead of being a symbolic precursor to a

collection of short stories revolving around Le's cultural heritage, the boat becomes a symbol of the various journeys that defy limitations of sex, gender, race, age, and nationality. As I will later explore in greater depth, Le's use of the boat is reconfigured to move away from an Asian stereotype into a powerful transnational symbol. The second text under examination, Brian Castro's *Shanghai Dancing*, is a fictional autobiography that focuses on the protagonist Antonio Castro and his return to Shanghai and various other places that are significant to his family histories. The places described in Castro's text contain traces of history and show the multiple, entangled personal narratives that make up the intricate mosaic of the Castro family. This fictional autobiography is not just a text about a return migration because it does not focus on the 'search' for any particular identity, but it demonstrates the process of always becoming. Castro's use of the idea of palimpsests to describe key ideas of identity through the various narratives, and the use of photography and the motif of the boat, converge to symbolise the transnational and ongoing potential of identity.

Transnationalism and Asian Australian Literary Studies

The issues of borders and territoriality have always been at the heart of nationalist movements. They are also the focal point of often heated and prolonged disputes between various nation-states, such as the conflict between China and several Southeast Asian countries over the territoriality of the South China Sea (Valencia 8; Kaplan 81). This engagement with border control and territoriality can also be likened to how identity is perceived often as bounded, accessible, simplified, and fixed. A more global understanding of identity points to the need for a more cosmopolitan sensibility, where ideas of sex, gender, culture, ethnicity, and nation state are being challenged, destabilised and changed. Australian poet and academic Kim Cheng Boey argues that:

> we live, read and write in a postnational, transcultural world where
>
> everything is in a state of transit and movement. Travel and translation are

terms that have gained currency, describing the experiences of moving

across borders and living in borderlands, real and imaginary. (Boey 5)

The transnational and transcultural turn in the humanities, as witnessed in Australian literary studies, provides scholars with a means of tracking and negotiating the constant movement of different narratives as they traverse different linguistic, cultural and national boundaries.

Scholars such as Wenche Ommundsen have also argued that writing itself is an act that brings into existence the development of a transnational consciousness. Writing is not an act that is restricted to any particular language, nor is it something confined within any specific location. Instead, the act of writing flows across different languages, cultures, and nations. Australian literary culture, according to Ommundsen, is currently experiencing this reconfiguration. The attention traditionally placed on the 'national' is defocused and is becoming refocused on a more transnational perspective. This change directly affects the 'Asian' dimensions that make up the body of Asian Australian writing and renders discussion about the politics of representation and of identity more complex.

Transnationalism, however, is not the only model these authors use to signal the nature of Asian Australian identities. As will be explored in this chapter, transnationalism highlights the span and reach of different cultural sites that are situated in different nations. In addition to the concept of transnationalism, this chapter will also focus on the significance of the concept of the palimpsest in these texts. The palimpsest symbolises the notion that identity is a continuous composition involving many histories and layers, all of equal importance. Hence, depth is given to the analysis of global identities because they carry traces of different places and pasts. Originally, a term used to describe a sheet of parchment on which earlier inscriptions were erased to make way for new ones, the palimpsest is now used in literary studies to describe other forms of layering in textual narrative. In their study of postcolonial literature, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (1998) argue that the

palimpsest is a significant motif in postcolonial writing. Traces left over from the past form 'an important part of understanding the nature of the present' (174). This understanding is explored in Paul Carter's book, *The Road to Botany Bay (*1987). In his discussion of the 'spatial histories' that have accrued to the Australian landscape, Carter identifies how the meaning associated with a particular place is neither stable nor permanent. He imagines how Botany Bay must have looked to Cook and the first settlers before it was named:

> Before the name: what was the place like before it was named? How did Cook see it? Barring catatonic seizure, his landing there was assured: but where to land, where to look, how to proceed? Where was the place as yet? ...What we see is what the firstcomers did not see: a place, not a historical space. (Carter xiii-iv)

Carter's narration of the Australian landscape and its spatial history from the time of Cook's landing in the eighteenth century to the present reveals how time, politics and socio-cultural influence and change the way a place is perceived. His work shows that understandings and meanings of place, much like those of identity, are susceptible to change.

The discussions on Chinatown and suburbia in previous chapters reflect this argument that cultural understandings of landscape change over time. In the past, Chinatown was understood as an unsanitary cultural enclave and ghetto for the Chinese miners who came to Australia to work in the gold mines. A different understanding of multiculturalism and a more open migrant policy have since helped transform the image of Chinatown. Today, Chinatowns across Australia and in other countries, such as the United States and Canada, are celebrated as a symbol of the diversity that is now part of each country's multicultural fabric. These Chinatowns have been successfully distanced from past stigma and now have their own iconic status within urban western cities, serving as popular tourist destinations around the globe. Similarly, the discussion on Australian suburbia in the previous chapter demonstrates how a social space within the nation that was once perceived as predominantly

white and middle-class has gradually changed into a more open and receptive transcultural space. Many Australian suburbs today are being slowly populated and shaped by people of many different cultural and social backgrounds.

The motif of the palimpsest has a very strong presence in Le and Castro's texts in other ways than in the multiple meanings that attach to place. The use of memory, family history, and personal narratives in the texts also help to construct and strengthen this motif. Yet, while the motif of the palimpsest forms a structure in these texts, at the same time it also destabilises the idea of an 'original' narrative. In her examination of Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Sharmani Patricia Gabriel comments that 'the idea of 'palimpsest' suggests that every narrative betrays other constitutive 'presences' so that nothing can claim the status of originary narrative (Gabriel 88). The absence of a genesis helps to displace and defocus expectations of a particular text, cutting it off from associations of ethnicity, class, sex, and gender.

Rushdie, in his book *Imaginary Homelands (*1992), uses the image of the palimpsest to explain his experiences of returning to India after an extended period of time has elapsed. Much like Boey, Rushdie uses the term 'translation' in his description of the continued diasporic and transnational experience.

> The word 'translation,' he comments, 'comes, etymologically, from the Latin for "bearing across". Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something also can be gained. (Rushdie 16)

As a tool, the palimpsest accounts for the reading and translating of the multilayered narratives and places that are presented in literary texts. In comparing Nam Le's *The Boat* and Brian Castro's *Shanghai Dancing,* this chapter will examine how both authors deploy the

concepts of transnationalism and the palimpsest to examine the changeable and globalised nature of identity.

Nam Le's *The Boat* (2008)

What are the forces that mark Nam Le a writer with a transnational consciousness? Is this the result of the various associations he has established with places outside of Vietnam and Australia? Le pursued his higher education in the United States and he currently holds an academic position in the United Kingdom. Is it possible for us to attribute this sense of transnationalism to the experiences of growing up Vietnamese or Asian in a primarily white culture? *The Boat*, his first collection of short stories, is characteristic of a transnational trajectory that is currently developing in Australian writing today. The text has received much critical acclaim and Le has garnered a number of writing awards, such as The Australian Prime Minister's Literary Award and the New South Wales Premier's Literary Award for Book of the Year. Unlike the other texts that have been examined thus far in this thesis, the stories in *The Boat* are different because, collectively, they are not focused on one particular locale. Instead, these stories span the world, as each is located in a different place and setting.

In this respect, Le's writing is reminiscent of famed British author Kazuo Ishiguro. Ishiguro, much like Le, challenges the stereotype of the 'ethnic' writer through the texts he produces. While his two early novels, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) and *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), are influenced by his Japanese ancestry, Ishiguro's writing after the publications of these works, such as *The Remains of the Day* (1989), *Never Let Me Go* (2005), and *The Buried Giant* (2015), is vastly removed from the confines of his personal life. Shang-mei Ma, in an essay on Ishiguro and post-ethnicity, comments that 'Kazuo Ishiguro's career destabilizes one of the most pressing issues of our time — ethnicity, underscoring at once its gravity and fleetingness' (Ma 72).

Nevertheless, the perception that 'ethnic' authors would almost certainly write about their 'ethnic' identity still exists, particularly when it comes to Asian–European writing, and

the publishing industry is reflective of this expectation. A number of Australian writers, such as Simone Lazaroo, have discussed the marketing strategy for 'Asian Australian' writing. She argues that this limitation on Asian Australian writers, or any writers of 'ethnic' background for that matter, means that their work may be perceived as necessarily another 'migrant story' ("Interview with Simone Lazaroo," *Peril.com.au*), and these kinds of categorisation often exclude considerations of other arguably more important issues in one's writing.

The link between the image of the boat and Asians is not exclusive to Australia. It is also seen in other countries. In the United States, Eddie Huang's memoir portraying his Taiwanese American family, *Fresh off the Boat: A Memoir* (2013), is a work that not only challenges the stereotypes that Asians confront in America, but also tries to reconfigure the image of the boat within the American cultural landscape. More recently, in Australia, writers of Asian descent have begun addressing what the image of the boat entails and its unjustified association with the 'ethnic story' in various ways. In her memoir, *Unpolished Gem* (2006), Alice Pung tackles the stereotype associated with the boat and the symbolic meaning behind the image within the opening lines of the text. 'This story,' comments the narrator, 'does not begin on a boat. Nor does it contain any wild swans or falling leaves' (Pung 1). Ommundsen, in her study of what characterises Asian–Australian writing as 'Australian', comments that Pung's opening lines in *Unpolished Gem* serve to remind the readers of two important, yet contradictory perspectives (Ommundsen, "'This Story Does Not Begin on a Boat': What Is Australian About Asian Australian Writing?" 504). Firstly, the opening lines serve as a form of disclaimer that the story that is about to unfold is not a story about refugees, victimisation and trauma. Secondly, whereas the story does not revolve around experiences of victimisation, stories such as these nonetheless are a part of life (504).

In his illustrated book, *The Arrival* (2006), Shaun Tan uses the process of digital imaging to create images of a migrant's story as he travels from the old country to a country that resembles Australia. There are several images in the book that depict travel by sea. Although

Tan's narrative for the images does not seem to be particularly novel, his depiction of a non-Asian, white migrant travelling to Australia is a gentle reminder of the country's migrant past. Additionally, the migrant's tale also helps to dissociate the link between the concept of 'boat people' and Asians and instead shows that migration and the search for a sense of belonging are not experiences that are reserved for Asians. In their own respective ways, Pung and Tan challenge the image of the boat and its popular association with Asian Australian writing. This endeavour can also be said to be a key part of *The Boat*'s thematic structures. To expand on this discussion, it is first necessary to look at how Australia is represented in Le's text.

Le's treatment of Australia can be examined in two entirely different ways. These two perspectives highlight how, as a multicultural nation, Australia itself is undergoing significant change. In the first instance, Australia is represented as a bounded space. This representation of Australia is characterised in the longest story in the collection, "Halflead Bay". "Halflead Bay" is best described as a foil or a counterpart to how Australia and other transnational places are explored in the collection of stories. This particular story represents the Anglo–Australian notion of being anchored by the sea and people's continued fascination of its space. For Anglo Australians these associations reach back to the ideas of 'discovery', arrival, and settlement. These associations are shown in the lives of the Anglo Australian family at the heart of the story, a family whose history is strongly tied to the sea. In particular, "Halflead Bay" focuses on the life of Jamie, a high school student who lives in the coastal town of the story's title. Once a sleepy and uneventful fishing town, Halflead Bay has over time developed into a popular holiday destination. For Jamie, who is at the cusp of adulthood, life seems to be a constant negotiation between home and school. His family history is anchored by ties to the sea as a source of sustenance, his father's family having trawled the waters of Halflead Bay for successive generations. Unlike Jamie's love interest, Alison Fischer, who is described in the text as someone from the city, who one day will return to the city, Jamie and his family are fastened by their connection to the sea. Jamie notes that 'his great-grandfather had skippered one of the first trawlers in Halflead Bay …

Jamie loved it — the idea that his family had worked that body of water for generations' (Le 151-52). However, it is not only the family history that is associated with the sea; Jamie's own memories are inextricably tied to his relationship with the sea through the time spent with his parents and younger brother:

> When he was little he used to follow his dad down to the wharf. Watched him cast off the hawser, chug out ahead a rimy trail of grease bubbles, the chorus of curses from the wharfies. … Best was when they went out in the little runabout with the two-stroke, him and his dad, and sometimes his mom as well – she'd be cradling a basket of barbequed chicken and some beetroots, sitting on rolls of butcher's paper as long as her legs… Then Michael. When he was old enough they took him along and together they explored the whole bight of the bay. They fished for King George whiting off the southern promontory and snapper and trevally in the deeper waters'. (Le 151)

The happiness of Jamie's terminally ill mother also lies with the sea as she refuses to leave the bay for better facilities to manage her illness. She would rather endure her pain and spend the rest of her remaining days with her family and her life by the sea than leave its space.

In contrast to the story "Halflead Bay", which represents a traditional understanding of Anglo-Australia as a bounded place of belonging, other stories in the collection represent Australia as a place of transition or departure. Nicholas Jose, in his commentary on Le's text, argues that Australian locations such as Sydney and Melbourne act as 'points of departure, places on the way' (Jose 5), rather than destinations. The fleetingness of these places constructs a sense that the feeling of belonging is only temporary. The temporary nature of the sense of belonging or, one could argue, the absence of any sense of belonging in the text, is foregrounded by the fact that migration seems to be a permanent condition.

This is vastly different from the texts examined in the previous chapters, where the protagonists seek a sense of belonging in Australia. For them, Australia is viewed as the ultimate end to a long journey and a large number of these texts deal with how the characters adjust, assimilate or address the sense of Otherness with which they are confronted. For some Asian Australian characters, such as Aghere in Pung's memoirs and the young narrator in Lazaroo's texts, Australia is the only place that the characters call home. They feel a sense of affinity to Australia, even though their 'belonging' is called into question, scrutinised, and suspect in the eyes of some white Australians. In comparison, Australian places in Le's text often symbolise a liminal space of belonging, passing points in a longer journey elsewhere.

This tension between the idea of Australia as the desired final destination for the Asian migrant and as a mere point along a spectrum of journeys is reflected in the different points of view of the Vietnamese father and his son in Le's autobiographical story "Love and Honour and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice". For the father of Nam, the protagonist in this story, Australia is positioned as the pinnacle of a summit after escaping Vietnam as a war refugee. In Australia, he is able to raise his son and shield him from the horrors he witnessed in Vietnam. In his new life in Australia, Vietnam is firmly hidden. It is only during rare occasions in the company of old friends that Nam's father reveals glimpses of his old life through the war stories they share. It is on one of these occasions that fourteen-year-old Nam finds out about his father's past and his father's own experiences of surviving the My Lai massacre as a fourteen-year-old boy:

> When I was fourteen, I discovered that he had been involved in a
>
> massacre. Later, I would come across photos and transcripts and books;
>
> but that night, at a family friend's party in suburban Melbourne, it was just
>
> another story in a circle of drunken men … For the first time, my father let
>
> me stay. … It took me a while to reconcile my father with the story he was

telling. He caught my eye and held it a moment, as though he were sharing

a secret with me. He was drunk. (Le 13-14)

This secrecy about the traumas of the past experienced in the home country is similar to the experience of Agheare's father in Pung's memoirs, where his memories of the civil war in Cambodia are never explicitly mentioned. Instead, the memories of these traumatic events manifest themselves in strange ways, such as in the habits that the father develops. In Le and Pung's texts, it seems that earlier generations of Southeast Asian migrants, especially those who have suffered trauma, wish to disremember or forget altogether their experiences from their homelands. These two fathers put away their traumatic pasts in favour of building a new future that will be inherited by their children. It is this voluntarily forgotten past that the protagonist, Nam, writes about in his story entitled 'ETHNIC STORY' (Le 17). Yet, while Nam's father prefers to forget about Vietnam altogether, as he demonstrates by burning Nam's only manuscript, he never fails to remind his son of their status as 'boat people'. He mentions to a homeless stranger that he read his son's story about boat people. 'I read his story,' he comments '…about Vietnamese boat people… *We* are Vietnamese boat people' (Le 12). The emphasis the father places on the term 'boat people' occupies an important part of Nam's feelings of his cultural background.

While for his father, Australia was imagined as his future and is realised as his present, Nam views Australia differently. For him, Australia is nothing more than a reference point within a global sense of belonging as he rejects the idea of identity specifically associated with his ethnic background. Having left Australia for the United States, Nam is working on a collection of stories as part of his stint at a writer's workshop in Iowa. While trying to remedy a bout of writer's block, a few people suggest to him that he should capitalise on or rather exploit his ties to Vietnamese culture and ethnicity as source material. 'Writer's block?', comments a friend, 'how can you have writer's block? Just write about Vietnam' (Le 7). A writing instructor also tells Nam that '… ethnic literature's hot. And important too' (Le 8).

Literary agents give the same advice, telling him to capitalise on his life experiences and background. The encouragement Nam receives from these people in part reflects the earlier discussion on how the publishing industry demarcates and encourages the publication of these ethnic literary works, such as those deemed Asian Australian. Nam starts listening to this advice on how his ethnicity can inspire his writing:

> You could totally exploit the Vietnamese thing. But instead, you choose to
>
> write about lesbian vampires and Colombian assassins, and Hiroshima
>
> orphans — and New York painters with haemorrhoids. (Le 9)

Here, the advice to write 'ethnic literature' brings to mind the stereotype of the boat. While neither the image of the boat nor the ocean appear physically in this particular story, they are central to Nam's effort to use his ethnicity as an inspiration for his writing. After remembering a story that his father has told in the past, he plans to document his father's story of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam. His father's story about this event reminds readers of the haunting and devastating human tragedy that took place during the Vietnam War. And yet, it is made clear that the story of Vietnam is his father's personal story and not Nam's. In an interview conducted in 2008, Le examines his relationship with Vietnam:

> My relationship with Vietnam is complex. For a long time I vowed I
>
> wouldn't fall into writing ethnic stories, immigrant stories, etc. Then I
>
> realised that not only was I working against these expectations (market, self,
>
> literary, cultural), I was working against my kneejerk resistance to such
>
> expectations. How I see it now is that no matter what or where I write
>
> about, I feel a responsibility to the subject matter. Not so much to get it
>
> right as to do it justice. Having a personal history with a subject only
>
> complicates this — but not always, nor necessarily, in bad ways. This book
>
> is a testament to the fact that I am becoming more and more okay with it.
>
> (*namleonline.com*)

Le's comments help explain the entanglement between ethnicity, identity, and writing. His autobiographical story demonstrates that it is possible to develop a transnational consciousness without having to negate or hide cultural background. More importantly, this story shows how Vietnam, Australia, and the United States are connected by a sense of temporality and mobility. These places represent an interplay between the past, present, and future, which highlights the estranged relationship between Nam and his father. His motivation to capture his father's story during the Vietnam War and the subsequent burning of the only manuscript by his father also shows the generational conflict between parent and child. The struggle between father and son is not only an intergenerational conflict, but is also born out of different life circumstances and different personal migrations. In comparison with his father's journey, Nam's personal migration is only the beginning of a long one. His own journey, which takes him across different continents, embodies contemporary transnational movement and marks him as a global citizen. The sense of being detached and disenfranchised from any nation state is hinted at from Nam's narrative not only in his attitude towards Australia, but also in the way he describes his life in the United States. His life in Iowa just 'is' and there does not seem to be an attachment on his part. Both he and his father are 'boat-people', but one seeks safety in stasis and the other seeks open possibilities in mobility.

The symbolic significance of the boat introduced in "Love and Honour and Pity and Pride and Compassion" is expanded to take on a more transnational turn in the remainder of the collection. The stories capitalise on the image of the boat as a sort of medium for people to cross geographical borders, but it also places emphasis on the idea of open possibilities and identities, upon which the concept of transnational identity is contingent. Here, the remaining stories focus on places that span different continents and are set within different time-scapes. Readers are taken to places such as contemporary upper–middle-class New York, Hiroshima during the Second World War, Tehran during the Iranian Revolution,

gang-ravaged Cartagena, and the non-geographical story set within a refugee boat fleeing the Vietnam War.

"The Boat", which is also the title of the collection, is the final story in the anthology. Whereas some of its backstory and context are anchored in Vietnam during the war, all of the key events that take place in the narrative are set within a dingy, overcrowded refugee boat fleeing Vietnam. The tale tells of the plight of a number of Vietnamese refugees in their attempt to flee the horrors of the Vietnam War by travelling within a cramped boat to a place of safety. Mai, the main protagonist, befriends a few people on the boat, among them a young woman named Quyen and her six-year old son, Truong. Readers are given minute descriptions of the different boats that Mai needs to take on her perilous escape. Most of the descriptions of the boats paint a grim picture of the unsanitary and terrible living conditions the refugees are forced to endure in their bid to escape:

> Inside the hold, the stench was incredible, almost eye-watering. The smell
> of urine and human waste, sweat and vomit. The black space full of
> people, bodies upon bodies, eyes and eyes and eyes and if she'd thought
> the first boat was crowded, here she could hardly breathe, let alone move.
> Later she counted at least two hundred people, squashed into a space
> meant for fifteen. No place to sit, nor even put a foot down; she found a
> crossbeam near the hatchway and hooked her arm over it. Luckily it was
> next to a scupper where the air came through…. Here, in the dead of
> night, contorted inside the black underbelly of a junk — she was being
> drawn out into an endless waste. What did she know of the sea? She was
> the daughter of a fisherman and yet it terrified her. (Le 284-86)

The journey to escape to a neighbouring country, presumably Thailand or Malaysia, would usually take around two days. But as the boat stalls and drifts at sea for more than ten days, the hope for safe passage fades fast. Diminishing rations, lack of clean drinking water,

the spread of disease and extreme climate lead to the death of many of the refugees and leave the majority incapacitated and ill. The dead are dumped into the ocean as a sort of quick sea burial in order to make space and stall the spread of disease. The hope for escape, and even survival, gradually disappears as the days pass by without any sight of land or any sign of help. This is what the conditions are like on the boat as the refugees' dreams and plans for a better future stand on the edge of a knife. Some, like Quyen and Truong, are planning to head to America once Quyen is reunited with her husband in a refugee camp in Malaysia. Others, like Mai, have no definite plans for the future, only the immediate one to flee Vietnam following a decision secretly made by her mother.

In this story, the ocean is the embodiment of many things. First, it is described as a benevolent giver of sustenance for Mai's family and the people of her village. Her father worked as a fisherman before the civil war broke out. Secondly, the ocean is a means of escape; a symbol of freedom and opportunity as it leads the refugees away from the destruction and oppression of the Communist government. And yet at the same time, the ocean is also portrayed as a frightening presence. It is described as haunting, unforgiving, menacing, and relentless as it rages against the frightened and helpless refugees. The oncoming storm described in the opening lines of the story foreshadows this ominous struggle that will greatly affect the people in the boat. After the storm passes and the boat's engine stalls, the refugees also have to contend with the intense heat of the sun as it heightens their desperation to find land. After the death of many refugees and after Truong becomes ill, an old woman comments, 'what it can do to you … the ocean. What it can steal from you and never give back. My husband. Both my daughters' (Le 301).

The old woman's comment summarises how the ocean is both their destroyer and their hell. As the boat travels slowly through the waters, the ocean slowly becomes a makeshift graveyard for the many who are not strong enough to survive the journey. For Mai and Quyen, the death of Truong at the end of the story, just as the people on the boat

finally spot land, is a devastating and tragic blow. As the main spatial setting of the story, the boat is also configured within the cycle of life, death, and renewal. It is a vehicle that enables them to leave the landscape of suffering and destruction in Vietnam, and yet, they are trapped within oppressive limits as their boat suffers damage. Before it brings the refugees to the safety of land and also to an unknown landscape and new life, it, also, is a landscape of death and suffering.

The fifth story in Le's collection takes readers to the dying hours before the first atomic bomb was dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Written in the first person, "Hiroshima" captures the story of a young Japanese girl near the end of the war in the Pacific in 1945. The narrator recalls the drills, the training, and the hardships that the war has brought upon the Empire, while at the same time trying to maintain a semblance of patriotism towards the Emperor and the country. This story exposes the juxtaposition between patriotism, which is reflected in Japanese involvement during the Second World War, and the sense of territoriality. Patriotic slogans such as 'Defend every last inch of the Fatherland!' (Le 190) and 'we will defend our nation through all eternity!' (Le 191) pepper the story. Near the end, the narrator decides to return home just as the *Enola Gay* drops the atomic bomb on the city. In the last moment, the narrator looks at the photograph of her family in her hand and recalls the experience of having her photograph taken:

> I look in my hand. On my left is Mother and on my right is Father.
> Behind me is Big Sister. The paper is mostly grey. Then everything turns
> white and the left side of my face is warm. Don't blink, says the man with
> the rabbit teeth. Don't worry, says Father. He laughs at me. Don't blink.
> Look here. (Le 203)

The excerpt above demonstrates that even while the idea of homeland and patriotism are defended in war, these very categories are ephemeral and fragile, open to the possibility of disintegration.

Pain, loss, love, and grief are some of the emotions that the characters experience within each journey. As such, Le is able to reconfigure the boat symbol from its simplistic association with the Asian 'ethnic' story to one that places emphasis on different personal experiences and identities. Hence, he manages to distance his writing from the ethnic label, showcasing it as a contemporary, cosmopolitan and transnational piece of work that helps dismantle and cross various borders. Ultimately, Le's play on the term 'border crossers' which is often used for boat people, demonstrates this major theme that can be transcended.

Brian Castro and the Convergence of the Memory and Spatial Palimpsests with Transnational Mobility

Brian Castro is an author who continually seeks to challenge contemporary conventions with his writing. His first novel, *Birds of Passage* (1983), is among the first English-language novels to be published by an Australian of Asian descent. Castro's seventh novel, *Shanghai Dancing* (2003), which has been described as a work of autobiographical fiction, continues his tradition of producing work that departs from conventional literary traditions and genres. It seeks to provoke and destabilise long-accepted concepts of identity, memory, history, time, and even space. The autobiographical novel follows the personal journey of Antonio Castro as he returns to Shanghai to uncover the truth of many of the secrets and mysteries in his family history. There, Antonio is met with different characters and is confronted by family histories and their haunting pasts.

These 'pasts' and 'histories' make up a large part of how the text is constructed around the idea of the palimpsest as a way of understanding the layers of identity. Most notably, the concept of the palimpsest is contextually linked to the idea of memory, particularly in the way that photographs are positioned in the text with a parallel and complex narrative of their own. Photography is conventionally understood as a visual aid for memory and as visual evidence in the documentation of historical events. However, *Shanghai Dancing,* demonstrates how photography can be used to re-invent memory, history, and the narrative of events, rather

than simply to strengthen their credibility. Annette Kuhn argues that acts of memory, such as taking photographs, are important in our lives (Kuhn 2). 'Telling stories about the past, about our past,' Kuhn comments, 'is a key moment in the making of our selves' (2). Kuhn's emphasis on the importance of history and memory to the making of the self is significant, because it illustrates how various photographs, memories, and histories are interwoven in Antonio Castro's own process of self-making.

Similarly, Bernadette Brennan places great emphasis on how Castro utilises the trope of photography as a device for re-imagining the past and the family tree in *Shanghai Dancing* (167). In her discussion of the text, Brennan likens Castro's use of the device to that of W.G. Sebald. She comments:

> Like Sebald, Castro offers photographs with no acknowledgment of their source but with the implicit suggestion that they may offer some form of documentary evidence. They seduce, tease, and confront the reader. Their questionable relationship with the surrounding text raises issues to do with authenticity, truth, and representation; unanswered questions which destabilise and challenge reading practices. (Brennan 167)

The photographs that appear in *Shanghai Dancing* are significant because they show the unreliability of the narrator and of the narrative as Antonio sets about seeking the history of his family. A 'false' visual representation of the past is part of the structural method through which Castro refuses to allow his narrative to 'settle'. The text opens with a quotation by Franz Kafka, which reads, 'We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds' (Castro x). Kafka's quotation is accompanied on the facing page by an old black and white photograph of a tall building, presumably taken in Shanghai. It is worth noting that at the end of the text Castro includes another undisclosed and uncredited photograph of a place resembling Shanghai during the 1930s. This draws the reader's attention to how pivotal and misleading photography and the whole narrative have been.

Castro's inclusion of Kafka's comment on the nature of photography at the beginning of the text foreshadows one of the important tropes that exist within the text: the concept of memory. Photographs are a main feature in the text and references to photographic techniques also serve to construct the layers upon layers of entangled meanings within the narrative. Among the many types of visual media, photography is considered a unique medium. On this point, Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko McAllister argue that:

> Above all, the photograph is widely held to be a record, a piece of evidence that something happened at some time, somewhere — in the time and the place in front of the camera. Unlike cinema, the photograph holds this recorded moment in stillness, capturing and offering up for contemplation a trace of something lost, lending it a ghostly quality … In seeming to capture times and places lost in the past, the photograph can disturb the present moment and the contemporary landscape with troubling or nostalgic memories and with forgotten, or all too vividly remembered, histories. (Kuhn and McAllister 1)

This comment highlights the important position of photographic acts in culture, history, and memory. Even though Castro eventually reveals in the text that the many photographs featured are false and disconnected from the narrative, the photographic sub-structure remains an important and a strategic one.

Moreover, Castro's play on the layered possibilities of memory is not limited to his play on photographic evidence but is extended in the narrative itself, which is constructed as one enormous photographic structure. Castro's narrative possesses a photographic quality because, as he searches for 'some marker of truth' (Castro 13) about his genealogy and the making of his self, it manages to capture snapshots or traces of the various memories and histories of his family, which are spread out across different spaces in geography and time.

Although photography is an important aid in the articulation of the layering of identity and memory in the novel, Castro implicitly uses the concept of the palimpsest in a variety of ways. First, he elaborates on the idea of belonging and identity as something constructed out of a complex and changing relationship with place, which is subject to change over time. Many places featured in the novel, particularly Shanghai, Macau, and Hong Kong, have the qualities of palimpsests in their own right, since they are places that have undergone radical cultural, political, and social change over time. Memory, place, and time in the text converge to construct a palimpsestic structure that draws together scattered events and spaces. The multiple intersecting narratives and the scale of transnational movement and mobility that the characters in the text undertake leave traces to form the palimpsests in the text, further complicating the palimpsest in *Shanghai Dancing*. Using a technique called re-photography, these palimpsests are identified and emphasised in the text.

The idea of re-photography is first introduced to Antonio by a woman called Carmen Woo, whom he meets on a street in Shanghai. Carmen is a professional photographer who is 'not interested in recording the truth' (Castro 13) and who subscribes to what Antonio calls revisionist ideals. Over dinner, Carmen comments that Antonio's pursuit of this truth in Shanghai shows that he is 'haunted … like the ghosting effect created in exposures that are too slow' (Castro 13). Her analogy of Antonio's search as something ghostly perfectly captures the haunted nature of his fragmented family history and how it affects Antonio's feeling of trying to belong somewhere. With re-photography, the traces or 'ghosts' in the narrative can be analysed in more depth. It is a technique where a photograph of a site, a place or a person is taken again after a certain period of time has passed. She suggests that Antonio apply the technique to the photos he has inherited from his family in the hope that it will help reveal exposures, ghosts, or any truths that Antonio is seeking. She advises, however, that these truths may or may not be something that he would want to confront or something that is easy to accept.

While Carmen is the one who suggests the idea of re-photography in an effort to aid Antonio, I contend that the idea of 're-photography' is also a textual device that highlights the motif of the palimpsest in the text. The text itself is a play on the concept of re-photography. It engages with the concept of the palimpsest, by exposing the layers upon layers of sediment that are made up of secrets, lost histories, and fragmented memories. In an essay published in *The Australian Humanities Review*, Castro comments, '… you went back through the palimpsests in your family letters and found discarded things; things covered over; Jewish things; and you began tracking them down' (Castro, "Dangerous Dancing: Autobiography and Disinheritance"). Castro's comment reflects the state of Antonio's struggles in the text. The scattered memories and histories of his maternal and paternal families and the places, and their journeys, are interwoven with his own. They reveal the sedimentary layers that remain largely buried and undisturbed. With this in mind, re-photography as a textual device enables the comparison between multiple points in time and space. Antonio's act of traversing different times and spaces reveals how things have both changed and remained the same. Brennan argues that this act of piecing together the family history is similar to Susan Sontag's work on photography. Sontag, Brennan claims, believes that photographs enable the expansion of people's worlds, which 'bears a close resemblance to Castro's literary project that conjures disparate worlds centuries apart' (Brennan 166).

In the text, Antonio's act of re-photography takes place in different forms and on different scales. The most immediate and obvious of these is his description of specific places and how these places may have changed over the course of time. His decision to return to Shanghai after spending forty years in Australia is demonstrative of this act of re-photographing certain spaces:

I survived forty years in Australia. My mind was never right. Time went

by. Then I got the urge to return to China. To those rising and falling

cities, now and then uncovered by the tide of memory. To pursue the

emptiness of things disappearing all around. (Castro 4)

Antonio's description of China, alluding to the economic and social changes that the country is undergoing, anticipates the change that he will witness. At the beginning of his return to Shanghai, Antonio fails to reconcile the Shanghai he is currently experiencing with the Shanghai from his memories and is swept away by the madness of the disequilibrium. And yet, as he attempts to run away from the madness of change and the chaos of the current Shanghai, he recognises the 'familiar sense of an old Chinese city' (Castro 6) lurking somewhere underneath it.

This sense of another layer, another existence, is not an isolated incident and can be traced in many different instances as the story progresses. Another example of this is Antonio's comment on how the 'Walled City is no more' and how, in its place, 'huge ugly buildings have risen from its ashes' (Castro 37). In a way, the text illustrates the transformation of places such as Shanghai and Hong Kong in a sort of a play on the non-linear and disjointed time lapse that Castro weaves into the narrative. This transformation of a particular place in the course of history, shown in the text, is reminiscent of Paul Carter's examination of not only the gradual transformation of the Australian landscape by the efforts of the Australian settlers over the years, but also its changing meaning. In a way, Castro's description of places lost in the flow of time is melancholic. This feeling of melancholy also emphasises the ambivalence Antonio feels towards his life in Australia, which he later abandons for his personal pursuit in Shanghai. Yet, as has been demonstrated, Shanghai only alleviates his discomfort and restlessness, bringing to the forefront Antonio's sense of displacement.

These textual articulations of photographs, however, reveal too many ghosts for Antonio, even though he initially complains inwardly that the photographs 'revealed so little' (Castro 17) of the truth he intends to find. When Carmen calls on him at the Hilton and

encourages him to get his hands on more of these photographs, Antonio resists as he believes that he is 'sick of photos … A smell came off them … death, the silver dust of dark museums' (Castro 17). This relationship between photography and death is a familiar association. This link is examined in great depth by Susan Sontag, who comments that:

> all photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability…Cameras began duplicating the world at that moment when the human landscape started to undergo a vertiginous rate of change: while an untold number of forms of biological and social life are being destroyed in a brief span of time, a device is available to record what is disappearing. (Sontag 15)

Sontag points to how photographs and photographic acts serve as reminders of death. They also highlight how reflective they could be to people who engage with, participate in or even witness them. Antonio's maternal grandfather, Virgil Wing, notes in a letter addressed to Antonio, that he feels that he is 'returned' to himself 'like a photograph' (Castro 425). Ironically, at the end of the text, it is revealed that Antonio himself has already passed away. His account of things that happen in the text shows that he is a ghost narrator. For Antonio and his 'photos', it shows the instability of meaning and the idea of authenticity. His destruction of the papers and photos by flinging them into the wind and water correlates with the tearing up of books, as was the habit of Arnaldo Castro in the past. His father tears books up after having read them, saying that he only needs to read the story once. Due to the importance placed on the concept of memory in the text, this idea of erasure is seen as a form of forgetting or disremembering. The revelation that these photographs are in fact false and have no bearing to his claim, his memories, or his family histories serve to show that finality is only an illusion and that nothing should be taken for granted as fixed and stable, even memory. 'Everything was collapsible,' comments Antonio, 'including memory'

(Castro 48). It is a mantra that is articulated in many forms many times over in the course of the text, existing as a subtle reminder to the reader not to take everything presented as validated truth. Additionally, the interplay between memory, history, and photography, and the palimpsest that their layers construct is important in its own way; it then intersects with the breadth of transnational movement that transcends the limitations of time.

While the palimpsest structures in the text serve to demonstrate the depth and complexity of identity, which is revealed to be in flux and ever-changing, the imagery of water, particularly the ocean, is an important motif that illustrates the span and breadth of transnational mobility that many of the characters in the text experience. This transnational landscape represented in the text serves to place further emphasis on the idea of identity and belonging by pulling these concepts into other multi-scapes. In different cultures and as depicted in several mythologies, the sea is an important archetypal symbol in human culture. Carl Jung, for example, explains that the sea is an archetypal symbol. When it appears in dreams, it seems to represent a collective unconsciousness, an argument that forms part of his discussion on the undiscovered self.

Given today's geopolitical climate and acute awareness of territoriality, the ocean is perhaps the biggest contradiction in a globalised world. While countries continually seek to demarcate their territories in open waters and invest money and labour in the attempt to control it, the ocean continues to be elusive and to complicate these efforts. In a sense, the ocean is neither 'here' nor 'there', but is essentially 'everywhere'. The fluid nature of water is not something that can be put under control and it is far from predictable. This ensures that it freely spreads and moves in many different directions. The water of the open ocean has the ability to trespass any sea borders agreed or disputed by nations. Yet, the water of the ocean is what connects all these nations together. The use of the ocean to link all the different family histories in the text is interesting. Despite Antonio's family histories and different character

narratives existing within a disparity and confluence of time and space, they are all bound together by their close link to the ocean and the boat imagery.

As in Le's short story, "The Boat", the sea in *Shanghai Dancing* is closely tied to the cycle of life, death, and renewal. The first chapter of the text opens with a large capitalised 'A' that is anchored within the word 'as'. As the first letter of the Roman alphabet, 'A' symbolises the genesis of Antonio's story. To further enhance this idea of a beginning, the opening text describes the life of a newborn baby. The baby is among the passengers of a beleaguered boat that is attempting to navigate through rough waters:

> AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING, once given voice…a singer in a register all its own…once given voice, the newborn cursed the sweating iron plates, the dank and putrid cabin, the green faces of his fellow travellers retching, spitting, stopped and doubled over, their mouths in spray, trailing strings of foam above the water while the seas roiled and sheets of rain billowed and wind grew slender waterspouts black and barbed as devils' tails up into heaven. (Castro 1)

The excerpt above foreshadows the turbulence that will dog the life of Antonio Castro and it also signals the different stages of life crises that the other characters confront in the text. The novel also ends with Antonio's death on water, a chapter that is marked with the word 'Zymosis', which balances with the letter 'A' that appears at the beginning of the text. As the text draws to a close, like the newborn baby in the beginning of the text, Antonio gets caught up in a storm. The storm opens a Pandora 's Box and unleashes the madness of all the histories of his family. With this storm on rough waters, the disparity between space and time seem to have disappeared and all the characters whom readers have encountered throughout the novel spill onto the ferry. It is during this madness that he shreds the fake photos and documents and releases them into the raging wind. This act again points to a forgetting, disremembering, or even a symbol of renewal. Here, the symbolism of not just

the sea, but of water in general is evident. In many cultures, water is the representation of life. But at times, bodies of water that are described as dark and murky with sediment can also represent death. The life and death of Antonio Castro, and the death of his mother Jasmine by suicide in the waters of Australia, refer to this cycle of life, death, and resurrection with which water and the sea are often associated. Antonio Castro was born on rough waters, and at the end of the novel his life is claimed by rough waters, completing this cycle.

Compared with the narrator in Lazaroo's novel, who from time to time looks at the sea with longing and as a source of comfort, characters in *Shanghai Dancing* take the opportunity to venture into the open sea to seek new beginnings and other life routes. Antonio's paternal ancestor, Israel de Castro, leaves Brazil to seek different landscapes and improve his fortunes. He eventually makes his way to the Far East, to Japan, the Philippines, and China. Members of Antonio's maternal family also take a similar route. All of them undertake the risk of leaving the comfort of their homes and making their way onto the sea to travel east, where life is unfamiliar. Dora Siddle's decision to leave England is described as more of a moral and religious obligation. Undoubtedly, her venture east does change her fortunes. She loses Harley to death and later marries Virgil Wing, a Chinese man she becomes acquainted with during her stay in a region up the Yangtze River.

The migratory journey of each character in the text follows a pattern in which different types of borders are simultaneously being crossed. In different types of boats, whether ferry, sampan or ship, all characters travel to leave one space for another. The novel commences with the birth of a baby on water. Then, it proceeds with Antonio Castro returning to China, after living in Australia for a few decades. From there, Antonio takes us back to his father's personal story in Shanghai, where the narrative gradually delves further and further up the two joined family trees to reveal how his families originally arrived in China.

In every account of the family history, the image of the boat appears in one physical form or another. In the years before the Second World War, Antonio's father, Arnaldo, invested in a number of ships and owned a successful shipping company. As part of his daily routine, he had an acute preoccupation with them and would look through the binoculars to view his various ships anchored at the harbor. Before the war with the Japanese intensified, he owned a steam yacht, a vessel that he used to cruise 'into the East China Sea flying a Union Jack, provoking shore batteries' (Castro 14). Later, readers are introduced to the story of Dora Siddle, Antonio's English maternal grandmother, who hails from Liverpool. Her story, too, is tied to the ships that bore the English missionaries to China in the early twentieth century. She travels to China with her first husband, Harley Siddle, as missionaries on a Baptist Mission and upon her arrival in China she has a feeling that 'she would die here … An open flower, in the heart of which lay damp and pungent decay' (Castro 44). Antonio believes that Dora's first view of China must have felt like looking

> [t]hrough the porthole into eternal twilight; a vast, red repository of
>
> useless invocations sent by the living to a frozen god; a beauty devoid of
>
> passion; a measure of greatness residing nowhere … It must have been
>
> how China appeared to my grandmother as she stood on that Shanghai
>
> dock waiting for her husband in 1910. (Castro 47)

Born in Brazil, Antonio's ancestor, Israel de Castro, leaves for Portugal by stowing away on one of the Portuguese ships. On troubled seas during his journey from Brazil to Portugal, he nearly loses his life when the ship almost capsizes during a tempest. He 'began to swallow water in the belly of the ship. He twisted and whirled like a rag doll in an eddying cauldron' (99). Even this near-death experience, however, does not stop Israel de Castro from pursuing other life opportunities via the sea. Later, he makes his way east, journeying to Japan and the Philippines. Through the generations, from Israel, Dora, Arnaldo and later to Antonio, the image of the boat is firmly anchored in the narratives of their lives, connecting

the different places — Australia, Brazil, England, Japan, Portugal and the Philippines. Unsurprisingly, if we examine how the boat links these various places, it can also be argued that the boat is a vehicle that breaks down the concept of time.

Time is stretched and manipulated in the narrative through flashbacks to different timeframes, switching, for example, from contemporary times — the 1930s, the 1940s, the early twentieth century —back into the era of the Portuguese colonial rule of Brazil. Regardless of the different times in which these characters exist, it is the same waters that carry their respective boats to the various places and eventually to Shanghai, where all of Antonio's 'family ended up' (Castro 77). Consequently, at the end of the novel, the time barrier breaks down completely during Antonio's last moments on the ferry, when every history and memory, whether false or true, spills onto the deck and takes free rein over his consciousness.

The intersection between the palimpsest and notions of transnationalism in the text reveals one important theme that resonates in many of Castro's works. The layers of identity, place, and belonging constructed in the text, together with transnational movement of the characters, illustrate that identity or self-identification is not something that is rigid, fixed, or singular. Instead, identity is multidimensional in character. Antonio's birth and death at sea serve to drive home the point that he is a global citizen. Furthermore, his search for the truth is not a journey of discovering himself. Instead, the 'truths' and 'mistruths' revealed to him in the course of this journey are fragments that help shape the ever-changing formation of his self-perception.

Conclusion

Although some may regard them as 'Asian Australian' writers, Le and Castro prove that writing is an act that liberates identity from the ties such as gender, culture, sexuality and nation. In particular, both *The Boat* and *Shanghai Dancing* articulate the idea of the cosmopolitan global citizen most profoundly through the different representations of

Australia and the inclusion of transnational landscapes. Texts examined in the previous chapters position Australia on a much larger scale and for the most part, Australia becomes seen as the 'end game'. In contrast, *The Boat* and *Shanghai Dancing* illustrate the making of a global citizenship by repositioning Australia as being only one point out of a series of different points within a transnational trajectory.

The idea of the global citizen is also highlighted in the way these works are liberated from the idea of assimilating into the Anglo Australian ideal. Through their different uses of the image of the boat, Le and Castro cut the association to stereotypes about Asian migration. In *The Boat*, Le successfully reconfigures the symbol of the boat as a metaphor for different personal journeys. At the same time, his treatment of the issues of 'ethnicity' and 'Vietnamese boat-people' in the text highlights how it is possible to acknowledge personal history without being bound and coloured by it. More visible than in Le's collection, Castro's use of the image of the boat in *Shanghai Dancing* shows how every family history is in some way or another bound to a close association with the boat and the sea. The birth and demise of Antonio Castro on water, between nations, symbolises not so much a state of being 'in-between', but the idea that contemporary identity should be as open, fluid, and unpredictable as the sea. In Castro's novel, in particular, this sense of transnational identity is further fortified by the use of memory and history of place, time, and narrative as a composite palimpsest that enlarges the idea of identity as something inherently mutable. In this respect, *The Boat* and *Shanghai Dancing* are both resistant to any kind of stereotyping or categorisation about 'ethnicity' in particular or 'identity' in general. Both writers weave together different spells that transcend the limitations of space and time, opening up possibilities for a notion of belonging that is unlimited by geographical or cultural boundaries.

Conclusion

In her introduction to *Alter/Asians: Asian–Australian Identities in Art, Media and Popular Culture*, (2000), Ien Ang suggests that at the beginning of the 21st century, there still exist serious concerns about Australia's relationship with Asia (1). These concerns have been publically controversial and have highlighted the ongoing hostility felt within some parts of the Australian community towards 'Asia' and 'Asians'. An orthodox perception of Australian identity has always positioned 'Asians' as the Other, despite the longstanding presence of 'Asians' within Australia since the mid-19th century. And while steps outlined in the *Australia in the Asian Century* White Paper (2012) demonstrate Australia's enthusiasm to be a part of Asia's increasing growth, Ang argues that, after three years, there is little proof that Australia feels at home amongst its Asian neighbours (Ang 1). Instead, there is a lingering sense that Asia primarily figures within Australia in terms of economic opportunity, rather than as a cultural partner. The continuing lack of Asian-literacy and understanding within Australia is partially responsible for why homogenising views remain reinforced. The exploration of contemporary Asian Australian identities, thus, remains a critical project.

While homogenising and antagonistic ideas about Asians and Asian cultures persist, the texts examined in this thesis have demonstrated that there is no such thing as a singular Asian experience. Although there have been calls that it is time for us to move on from our fixation with race and identity politics, such as those proposed by Terry Eagleton in *After Theory* (2004), the issue of identity within an Australian context remains a relevant issue for as long as minority cultures are still subjected to identity stereotypes maintained by larger, 'normative' groups. This thesis has set out to explore representations of how different cultural spaces reflect Asian Australian identities in selected texts, and how these representations of identity help to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about 'Asianness' in Australia. The literary works examined here introduce a more nuanced, plural, and flexible understanding of Asian Australian notions of belonging by highlighting different engagements with identity politics. When contextualized within apparently familiar cultural

sites such as the home or suburb, the complex experiences of the protagonists demonstrate the struggles of both Asian migrants to Australia and Australians of Asian-descent in attempting to define themselves against normative gendered, sexual, cultural, and social expectations. What all these texts have in common, therefore, is that they deal with issues of border-crossing in various ways, and they address and challenge embedded notions of essential 'identity'.

Moreover they demonstrate that being 'Asian Australian' does not only mean dealing with the complexities of being 'Asian' or of Asian-descent., but it also means challenging what it means to be 'Australian', in a context where being 'Australian' has long been focused on the idea of 'whiteness'. Critical re-readings of race and power have often centred on how the concept of 'whiteness' figures in central narratives about national identity, because whiteness has been a normative position taken to be a 'natural' fact (Pickering 91; Tascón 266). The legacy of white privilege and white identity are founded upon a social construction that perpetuates and exerts the strategic power of 'white superiority'. This construction capitalises upon the idea of 'race' and 'skin colour' as categories that are inherently hierarchal, and as a reflection of that ideology, the White Australia Policy (1901-1972) is part of Australia's legacy of racism. In her study of whiteness and indigeneity in Australian fiction, Anne Brewster comments that 'white anxiety and defensiveness perpetuate a stringent apartheid that largely forecloses on any rapprochement between black and white' (86). Given the history of Australia as a set of European colonies, the idea of 'white skin privilege' continues to play a significant role in the perception of what constitutes 'Australian' and 'other'.

In challenging this enduring concept of 'white skin privilege, one of the preoccupations of a number of the texts featured in this thesis is the tyranny of appearance, and the body as a contested identity space. As the 'geography closest in' (Rich 212), the body becomes an entrapping cultural category for some of the protagonists discussed here because

it is the most immediate catalyst for recognising 'difference' within society. This link between outer appearances and identity is often demonstrated in diasporic and postcolonial writing, and is equally evident in these Asian Australian texts. In particular, Hsu Ming-Teo's *Behind the Moon* explores the disabling effects of being categorised by outward appearances and physical markers. In Teo's text, stereotypical assumptions about the categories of Asianness and whiteness are compared when two of the protagonists, Justin and Tien, are judged on how 'Asian' they appear, not only to mainstream Anglo Australian society but also to the Chinese Australian community in which they have been raised. Justin's 'Asian' appearance puts him at the mercy of normative ideals of whiteness while Tien's non-Asian appearance subjects her to ridicule from her mother's family. Even though racialised difference forms the larger part of the narrative, the juxtaposition of 'normative' and 'different' is also tied to how bodily appearance affects perceptions of sexuality and gender. While these markers of difference inscribed on the body are often vilified, Teo also shows how they can be exoticised by the larger society. Although it may seem that vilification and exoticism are at odds with one another, both are limitations that serve to hold a person to particular social expectations.

However, what happens when the body is liberated from societal constructs? What if the body has the ability to change continually from one form to another, without the social stigma that it entails? These questions, and the different concept of identity they invite, are core to Cho's collection of short stories, *Look Who's Morphing*. Using iconic references to popular culture, Cho reworks the body into a nebulous entity that transcends ideas of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity and is capable of becoming an interactive and evolving space. This configuration of the body as a physical articulation of different states of identity creates a fluid notion of identity as something that is always in a state of flux and a work-in-progress. Ultimately, while these two texts address the different ways in which outer appearances both create and challenge various identity constructs, both narratives affirm the importance of being at home in one's body.

This idea of being at home is further explored in this thesis through the representations of domestic space as an avenue for charting the evolution of identity. A concept of belonging that centres on domestic space reflects the concept of home as the first and principal place where personal and collective identities are generated and nurtured. Alice Pung's two memoirs, *Unpolished Gem* and *Her Father's Daughter*, track the life of the narrator and the evolution of her changing sense of self through the different domestic spaces she inhabits. Each of the domestic spaces in the memoirs represents a critical phase of identity-construction in her life. The first memoir, *Unpolished Gem*, focuses upon the family space of her childhood home and deals with how this space showcases the family's efforts to adapt and assimilate into Australian society. *Her Father's Daughter* focuses on the now-older narrator's attempts to negotiate two different cultures, while she tries to cultivate for herself a personal space. The tension she feels lies between a bid to follow inherited expectations from her parents and grandmother, and the freedom to pursue her own path.

This tension is not only evident in Pung's memoirs, but is characteristic of a number of texts in this thesis. Characters from the second and succeeding generations of migrants experience a personal struggle to find a balance between inheriting the culture of their parents and growing up within the immediate Australian culture. This struggle demonstrates a concern with intergenerational inheritance, particularly in works by a younger generations of Asian Australian writers such as Nam Le, Tom Cho, Simone Lazaroo, in addition to Pung. Intergenerational inheritance can either be a source of conflict in migrant families or a comforting repository of culture and belonging. Intergenerational conflicts not only problematise the struggle of the younger generation in negotiating cultures, but also highlight the grief of the older generation in experiencing a gulf of separation from their children and alienation from the wider society. In Pung's works, the narrator learns how much she wants to borrow from the past and adapt it into her future in the process of determining her self-identity. Her curiosity to discover more about her ancestral homeland leads her to China and

then Cambodia. Although she does not feel a sense of belonging there, she uncovers more about her parents' past which enables her to connect to her cultural heritage.

The necessity and effort of new migrants in adjusting to the host society is an integral theme in much diasporic and migrant writing, along with the associated theme of how much they choose to assimilate. As a cultural space, Chinatown provides a commentary on this question of degrees of adaptation and assimilation, because it represents a pocket of the 'old' culture embedded into the 'new'. The examination of different representations of Chinatown in the anthology *Growing Up Asian in Australia* reveals its potential to be both a bounded 'Asian' space and a porous multicultural space. At the same time, its potential as a cultural repository of memory is represented as being particularly important for younger generations of Asian Australians, who might feel more disconnected from their cultural heritage than their parents. As a site of cultural heritage, be it through language or through other forms of culture, Chinatown has proven to be a significant source of identification not only for people of Chinese-descent, but also for members of other Asian communities in Australia. Moreover, it is a space where the Australian 'mainstream' can locate and identify with a sense of multiculturalism. In this respect, Ang argues, Chinatown is a hybridized cultural space that is as liberating for 'mainstream' Australian identity as it is comforting for 'Asian' Australian identity:

> [It] is no longer a Chinese communal enclave, separate from the Australian mainstream. It is a dynamic, vibrant, multicultural, metrolingual and cosmopolitan precinct with an intensified, thoroughly creolised Asian-Australianness, where white Australia's protectionist insular imagination is simply no longer practicable. ("At Home in Asia? Sydney's Chinatown and Australia's 'Asian Century'" 11)

In the collection *Growing Up Asian in Australia*, Chinatown is shown to be a rich and heteroglot space to which characters of Korean, Malaysian, Vietnamese, and other heritages

can all equally belong. In the stories, some of the characters recover part of their cultural heritage through the language, food, and culture to be found in Chinatown. Others find new experiences within its fluid boundaries. This shows that Chinatown provides more than just the comfort of the 'ghetto'; it also allows some people to reclaim, and even discover or extend, some part of themselves.

While Chinatown provides support to people of Asian-descent to recover or find a their sense of cultural heritage, the cultural space of the Australian suburb is an explicitly raced, classed, and gendered space that can challenge Asians, particularly migrants, as they try to make a life for themselves in Australia. Conventionally viewed as an exclusively Anglo Australian domain, the suburb has become a contact zone in which Asian Australians and Anglo Australians are forced to confront one another. Some commentators have regarded the settling-down of Asians in the suburbs as a threat to the sovereignty of Australian life (Blainey 120). This response to the imagined threat that 'Asianisation' poses to the Australian lifestyle, however, has not discouraged Asian migration into the suburbs. Instead, this pattern of migration has contributed to the gradual change of the suburban landscape. Now, a growing number of Australian suburbs exhibit, to borrow Amanda Wise's (2010) term, 'multicultural place-sharing' (918), where cross-cultural interaction takes place within a shared space. Although the integration of Asian families into suburban areas is increasing, the experiences of some of the protagonists in the texts examined here expose the tension of living within suburban space.

This tension underpins Simone Lazaroo's novel *The World Waiting to be Made*. The protagonist, who came to Perth from Singapore as a child, experiences the oppressive and racist climate of 1970s Australia. However, the racial climate within the text is not one that is very aggressive. Instead, it is focused on the 'habits of whiteness' (Macmullan 2). These habits are subtle, apparently benign, and often go unnoticed, but they still perpetuate forms of racism. The Perth suburb represented in the novel contains and reinforces these habits,

compelling the narrator to mark how she and her family are different from the suburban status quo.

Whereas Lazaroo's novel shows the reality of suburban life from the point of view of an Asian-descended 'insider', Siew-Siang Tay's *Handpicked* depicts how suburbia is configured as a landscape of fantasy for those not privileged to live within its boundaries. Laila's life firstly in Sarawak and later in Jim's caravan is often juxtaposed with her visions of what suburban life could provide. Her pursuit of suburban life forces her to make difficult choices and these efforts ultimately end in disappointment. Letting go of her dream to live a suburban life, Laila eventually returns to her husband and makes an attempt to create a prospect for the future, albeit within limits.

Lazaroo and Tay's novels respectively depict the lived experience and the dreamed fantasy of the suburban landscape, and in both cases, suburbia becomes an entrapping trope for the female protagonists. In both novels, however, the protagonists find relief from the entrapment or disappointment of Australian suburban life through closer association with water. For the unnamed narrator in Lazaroo's text, the beach is a liminal space between the confines of the suburbs and the openness of the ocean. At the beach, the narrator experiences a sense of future and uncharted possibility. For Laila in Tay's novel, the Murray River that reminds her so much of the Rejang River back in Sarawak serves as a source of comfort, as a link back to her past life, and as a source of strength in facing the future.

Bodies of water, such as the ocean, are important metaphors because they symbolise endless horizons for the characters in some of these texts. They also symbolise acts of border-crossing on a larger scale because, as a vast and fluid landscape, they link various nation-states together. While acts of border-crossing have been symbolically articulated in various ways in this selection of novels, the ocean can provide a setting for actual border crossings and transnational movement to take place. The move towards a more transnational turn is a significant development in the study of Asian Australian experiences. A global and

transnational lens has helped to enrich existing dialogues about diaspora, heterogeneity and hybridity, which mark the study of Asian Australian experiences. Transnationalism also helps to reshape how we think about the concept of nation and nationhood by forcing us to (re)examine orthodox conceptions of national history and cultural space. In this respect, Jacqueline Lo argues that Asian Australian studies:

> emphasises mobility and traveling as major tropes for unpacking the
>
> identity formations and knowledge productions of diasporic communities
>
> with cultural allegiances and political connections across some sites within
>
> and beyond the nation. ("Disciplining Asian Australian Studies: Projections
>
> and Introjections" 18)

Themes of mobility and traveling establish much broader types of contact zones than those limited within national, or even urban, spaces. In particular, the boat provides an image of unrestricted mobility despite the rigidity of borders and territories. Using the boat as a literary device, Nam Le's collection of short stories *The Boat* highlights this concept of going beyond physical and symbolic borders. In some the short stories in the collection, Le weaves ideas of border-crossing together with themes of loss, pain, and recovery. Ultimately, Le's collection of short stories showcases a tension between the idea of Australia as a desired destination and its reconception as a stopping point in a longer personal journey. This theme of broader personal journeys and the development of a transnational consciousness are extended in Brian Castro's autobiographical novel *Shanghai Dancing*. Similar to Le, Castro uses the tropes of the boat and the ocean to illustrate the story of Antonio Castro and his efforts to reconcile his family's various secrets and fractured histories. In Castro's text, the global movement provided by travel is merged with the concept of city spaces as a form of palimpsest. The palimpsest motif, enriched by imagery of photography, offers a commentary on the layering of identity over time and space. Transnational readings of landscape in Le's

and Castro's texts reveal how transnational mobility can contribute to a more mutable definition of identity, and express the idea of a global cosmopolitan citizen.

Above all, the selected works examined in this thesis exhibit a sort of double, even plural, consciousness that develops from the cross-cultural experience of being Asian Australian. In this respect, they serve to encourage a complex exploration of contemporary understanding of Asian Australian experiences in an increasingly globalised world. They serve to point out that contemporary Asian Australian literature is not a 'one-note' literary genre and demonstrate how Asian experiences in Australia are, in reality, an entanglement of dissimilar perspectives. On the one hand, Asian Australian literature explores various migration and diasporic experiences that people have come to associate with Asian Anglo writing. On the other hand, as evident in the works that have been explored in this research, themes of Asian migration and diasporic experience in Australia are but a small part of Asian Australian writing. Instead, Asian Australian writing also takes into consideration a wider array of experiences, including those of Australian-born people of Asian-descent, whose family history may go back as far as the earliest European settlement in Australia.

Since this thesis does not aim to be a comprehensive study of cultural spaces and their relationship with identity processes, there exists an opportunity for further research beyond its limits. The subject positions of Asians and Australians of Asian-descent can be examined within literary works published in languages other than English, for example. Other key cultural sites not considered in this project might also give a broader view of what it means to be Asian and Australian in the 21st century. In other words, we have scope to question whether there is a future for such a category as 'Australian' and 'Asian Australian', in a climate where national boundaries continue to be placed under scrutiny. Will the turn to transnationalism and transculturalism make such categories less relevant? These questions will be productive for further critical examinations of how the Self and the Other, and the idea of 'difference', can be imagined.

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